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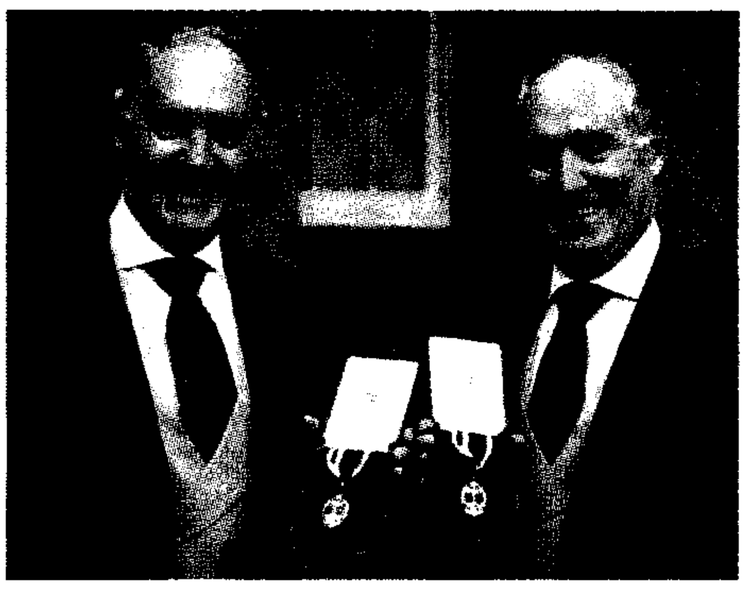
Daily Telegraph Christmas Appeal



AT THIS season of charity and goodwill, our thoughts naturally turn to all those who are less fortunate than ourselves – above all, the hapless victims of cruelty and injustice. We think, in particular, this Christmas of two twin brothers incarcerated in their island prison who find themselves faced, through no fault of their own, with a massive bill for libel damages and costs, due to the incompetence of Lord Black and the staff of the *Daily Telegraph*.

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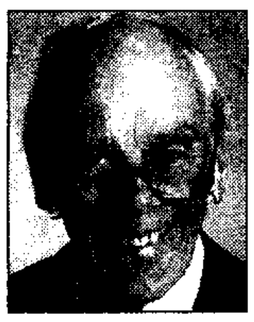

BILL DEEDES, the world's oldest man

BORIS JOHNSON, the fun-loving former shadow minister for whatever it was

CHARLES MOORE, who wishes to make it clear that he was on holiday at the time when the offending piece about Mr Galloway was published

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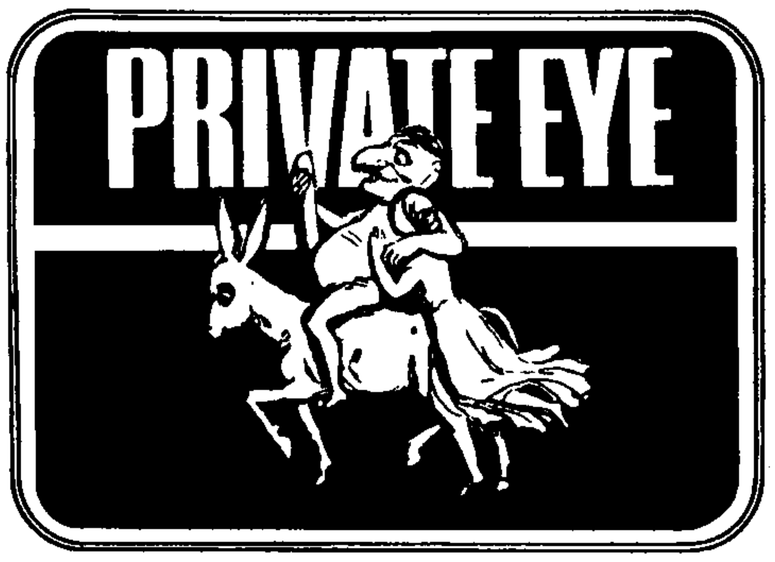

Home affairs!

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THE reputation of the *Daily Telegraph*'s leading counsel in the Galloway libel case, James Price QC, is in a state of disrepair following last week's judgment.

Overlooked in the newspaper reports on Friday was the fact that Mr Justice Eady made such a large award of damages to Galloway partly because of Price's "high-handed and insulting behaviour in court".

During his cross-examination of the MP, Price made a charge of anti-semitism against Galloway, a charge Galloway eventually forced him to withdraw. In another exchange, about Saddam's use of chemical weapons at Halabjah in 1988, Galloway explained that he had condemned Halabjah at the time "unlike the British and American governments, who went on supplying Saddam Hussein with weapons", but that he was sceptical about the supposed death toll of 12,000, believing it to have been exaggerated for propaganda reasons. "Are you defending Saddam Hussein now over Halabjah, Mr Galloway?" Price asked.

"How dare you?" replied the MP. Mr Justice Eady concluded that Price's remarks "were gratuitous and would appear to have served no legitimate purpose in the litigation". He accepted the submission of Galloway's QC, Richard Rampton, that both exchanges amounted to aggravation of the original allegations. Furthermore, in inviting Mr Justice Eady to make a contemptuous award of damages, if any, in Galloway's favour, Price asserted that Galloway had "engineered" matters to his own advantage and may have "misled" the parliamentary commissioner for standards. The judge found that "such allegations are in themselves insulting".

ONE allegation against David Blunkett from the Kimberly Quinn camp – that he ordered a police guard to be placed on her Mayfair home during May Day demos in 2002 – at first received little attention.

Most newspapers bought the home office line that there were many police in the area on that day, so to talk of any one residence getting special protection would be, as Blunkett's spokesman put it, "paranoid nonsense".

Yet less than a year later the Quinn-Fortier house certainly did receive special police protection on the order of the home secretary. A group far more terrifying than anarchists or anti-globalisation demonstrators was on the loose – two small boys from the local primary school who were playing "knock down ginger", the ancient practice of ringing doorbells and running away.

The *Eye* in fact reported this story in March 2003, without knowing the identity of the "well connected" Mayfair resident who had rung David Blunkett to complain about the schoolboys (*Eye* 1076). Blunkett informed the Met commissioner, Sir John Stevens, who passed it down the chain of command. The local rozzers were despatched to St George's primary school to speak to the headmaster, Malcolm Lothian. The head ticked off two boys in year six and the nuisance stopped.

Interestingly, the home office now concedes that, unlike the May Day guard allegation, Blunkett did intervene on behalf of the Quinns in the Great Doorbell Mystery. The tactic has been to inflate the seriousness of the offence, with Blunkett's spokesman claiming that the Quinn's nanny, Luz Casalme, had complained of "racial abuse" and that the boys had banged on the windows. The spokesman said: "People would expect him to do nothing less."

Ms Casalme, however, denies making any complaint about racial abuse. The police certainly did not mention it when they visited the school. And a tall railing outside the Quinns' house would put the windows out of reach of any 10-year-old. The *Eye*'s source for the original story describes the "racial abuse" justification as "piffle… it was a case of two boys ringing on doorbells, that's all".

Our story in issue 1076 spawned a long and, er, fascinating correspondence about the name of the game (knock down or knock up?) and anecdotes of variants. But whatever the children's game is properly called, the game the grown-ups were playing was clearly that old favourite, "knock up mistress".

DAYS after causing a massive computer calamity at the department for work and pensions (DWP), our old chums at EDS cheekily submitted a £4bn bid to provide IT for all Britain's armed services.

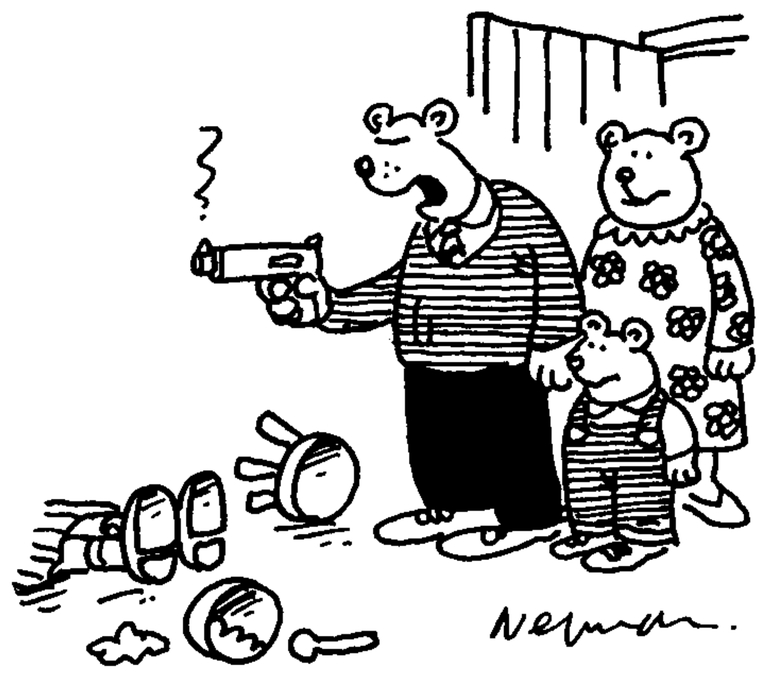
Atlas, a consortium headed by EDS, is one of two bidding for the MoD contract to create a single, common system for UK services which will be "interoperable" with US military systems.

This all sounds sensible and joined-up until one recalls the chaos last month when a trial upgrade of a handful of machines by EDS caused more than 80,000 of the DWP's desktops to crash for several days, delaying benefit claims.

Then there was the "badly designed, badly tested and badly implemented" £456m computer system EDS supplied to the Child Support Agency. Or the cock-up this August when the £500m electronic benefits transfer system supplied by EDS packed up and left pensioners unable to get money before the bank holiday weekend.

EDS's track record with the armed forces isn't great either. A contract with the US navy has been little short of disastrous, costing the firm more than $500m in written-off assets (and leaving US navy computers infected with the infamous blaster worm virus in 2003).

The other bidder for the defence information infrastructure contract is a consortium named Radii, whose members include BT, Computer Services Corp and French arms company Thales. It's hard to say if they would be a better bet, but even harder to imagine that they could be *worse*. The winner will be announced in March.



"Who's been stealing my porridge?"

"Still funny after all these years, the Private Eye Annual 2004 is out now." – Evening Standard

Street of Shame

"THE *Sunday Express* is today calling on the government to bring back the official TV censor, after finding six programmes in a week which may have been in breach of broadcasting rules."

With this clarion call, on 21 November the newspaper launched its new crusade against filth on the box. A two-page feature named and shamed offenders such as "Channel 4's highly controversial new sex guide programme *The Sex Inspectors*" and two Sky shows which "featured a repetition of the F-word". The article was accompanied by an adulatory profile of the late Mary Whitehouse, the inspiration for the *Sunday Express*'s campaign.

Curiously, however, there was no mention of the Fantasy Channel. Uniquely among national newspapers, the *Express* and its sister titles the *Daily Star* run daily listings for this channel, whose offerings include *Filthy British Lesbo Sluts*, *Pussy Malone*, *The Video Adventures of Peeping Tom*, *Vice World*, *Superdick*, *Babes in Pornland: Interracial Babes* and *Dripping, Wet and Wild*. The *Star*'s TV page also carries a huge ad-panel every day urging readers to subscribe to the Fantasy Channel, the Amateur Action Channel and the Erotic Films Channel.

Not surprising, since they are all owned by Richard "I'm not a pornographer" Desmond. But what would Mary Whitehouse have made of them? And what will the censor think, if the *Sunday Express* campaign achieves its aim?

***OBSERVER* editor Roger Alton seemed to be able to read the minds of some of his staff as they said farewell to the offices they have shared with the *Guardian* before moving to a nearby building.**

As they gathered on the newsfloor, Alton told the assembled throng: "Well, folks, tonight's your last chance to shag each other on the desks."

THE *Daily Express*'s unusual approach to news has never been more in evidence than in its "Diana's Spy at the Ritz Exclusive" of 3 December.

In a story written almost entirely in the passive tense, hack John Twomey revealed that "it was claimed yesterday" that Henri Paul, the driver of the car in which the princess died, was a spy, that he "allegedly" informed on guests, "was said to have" worked for the French security services, and "understood to have" taken on commissions for other agencies at the hotel which was "believed to have been" a hotbed for such activities.

Oddly, the paper gave no clue as to who might have been making such allegations, or why the paper was reporting them now. It was not until a record-breaking nine paragraphs into the story that anyone was actually quoted as actively claiming anything – and sadly, that was Mr Paul's father saying "this is absolute rubbish".

IN 2001 the *Sunday Mirror* published an interview with the father of a young Asian whom two Leeds footballers were accused of assaulting. Since the interview appeared while the court case was under way, the judge was left with no choice but to call a halt to proceedings and order a re-trial. *Sunday Mirror* editor Colin Myler was forced to resign and the Mirror Group faced contempt of court charges.

Neither received much sympathy in the Street of Shame. "Editor in Trial Fiasco Resigns", the *Daily Star* reported. In an article headed "The Scoop that Spelled Bad News", the *Express* singled out the editor for blame: "The newspaper's legal team would normally have been consulted before the presses began running, but ultimately it is the editor's decision to publish."

At the end of last month, another tabloid newspaper was up before the courts for publishing the names of two footballers who were alleged to have been part of the notorious Grosvenor House Hotel "roasting" circle. The paper was fined £60,000 for contempt of court. Strangely, however, this was not covered in either the *Star* or the *Express*. Perhaps that had something to do with the fact that the paper in question was the *Star* and the editor who decided to reveal the footballers' identities was Peter Hill, now in the hot seat at the *Express*.

PS: Hill has yet to make clear how this tallies with his claim in the *Observer* earlier this year that "I fully subscribe to the PCC's rules on privacy."

Flawed greatness

SOME of our greatest historical figures have been adulterers. Regrettably, the days have vanished when an ability to do the job in hand came first

The Times

***DAILY Telegraph* editor Martin "beefcake" Newland recently told Charlie Methven, editor of the paper's Spy diary column, that he didn't think the Barclay brothers liked gossip. He thus relegated the Brylcreemed Old Etonian hack to a once-weekly diary on Saturday.**

Newland then appointed Celia Walden as editor of a reduced Spy column and instructed her not to rock the boat. And Celia, daughter of pompous former Tory minister George Walden, has been happy to oblige, going beyond the call of duty in her efforts not to offend the supposedly moralistic Barclay twins.

More than two years ago (on 5 March 2002) Methven reported that Emma Thompson and her husband Greg Wise would not be starring in a film for which she was co-writing the script with Nick Hornby. "A film is always likely to lose its romantic tension," Thompson explained, "if the audience knows the leading actors have already shagged."

When Walden returned to the story two weeks ago she included this line – but with one subtle change. Thompson was quoted as saying, "with characteristic earthiness", that a film was likely to lose its romantic tension "if the audience knows the leading actors have already slept together".

If "slept together" represents earthiness, whatever would the Barclays have made of "shagged"?

THE *Observer* devoted 2,000 words of its review section and a chunk of its front page to "design guru" Kelly Hoppen on 21 November, prompting raised eyebrows and cries of "who she?" among its readers – and, it would seem, elsewhere in the paper.

The "Fashion Tense" barometer in the same day's *Observer Magazine* put Hoppen firmly in its "past" column, placing the "queen of taupe" firmly in the dumper alongside "Big Pants" and "Being Nice to Staff".

Number crunching

£400,000

■ Amount the Daily Telegraph claimed George Galloway made a year from Saddam

£400,000

■ Amount George Galloway has now made from the libel courts

HAVING resisted the trend for years, the *Daily Mail* recently launched its own website. But it seems Paul Dacre's web-wallahs haven't yet got the hang of what online punters are willing to pay for.

Anyone wanting to peruse Peter McHackey's column, for example, is required to shell out £2 a week or £8 a month for the dubious privilege. If you prefer, however, you can read all the *Mail*'s star columnists for an annual fee of £240. According to the website, this gives you access to such literary giants as Melanie Phillips, Carole Caplin and, er, Adam Helliker.

Subscribers taking up this extortionate offer may feel cheated in more ways than one. The *Mail* has apparently forgotten that it sacked Adam Helliker more than five months ago.

ANY *Mail on Sunday* staff who venture into Canary Wharf do so at their own risk.

Sunday Telegraph editor Dominic Lawson – currently campaigning for the legal right to use lethal force against those who steal his property – denounced his rivals as "lazy crooks" guilty of "flagrant theft" after they reprinted an exclusive photograph of Blunkett's fast-track nanny Leonicia Casalme from his own paper.

This is not the first time Lawson has threatened the use of near-lethal force on a publication that has reused pictures from his own organ. Earlier this year an apoplectic Lawson threatened dire retribution on a hated rival publication which unwittingly reprinted a photograph of an injured hedgehog from his own collection, bellowing at tittering colleagues that it was "no laughing matter."

The paper in question? His sister publication, the *Daily Telegraph*.

SEASONAL confusion at the *Daily Telegraph*, which decorated its front page on 1 December with the promise of "Wicked Wellies for Summer".

All was made clear on page 5, however, where it was revealed that the footwear was simply part of Marks and Spencers' range for next year – which also included a rather nice bikini, as modelled by a sultry (and chilly) model standing in a London street.

Editor Martin Newland, who promised when he took over last year that "if I see one more picture of bikini-clad girls under the pretence that its news, I'll be furious", must be spitting.

***OBSERVER* columnist Will Buckley devoted all his space a couple of weeks ago to an extended moan about the absence of novels from the shortlist for the William Hill sports book of the year prize.**

"Once again fiction is not represented," he complained. "Indeed, in the 16 years of the competition, a work of fiction has not made the starting line-up. Which is strange…"

Strange and rather distressing, at least for Buckley. Although he omitted to mention it, one work of fiction overlooked by this year's judges was *The Man Who Hated Football*, a novel about an embittered sports hack written by a certain Will Buckley.

"Oh, a spoonful of sugar helps the visa application go through quickly"

MANY readers have been puzzled by the smarminess with which the Blunkett affair has been covered in News International titles.

When the *News of the Screws* broke the story on 15 August, an accompanying editorial claimed that it revealed him as a "very human" figure: "Indeed, he is undoubtedly the right man for his exacting job with an impressive record of achievements and a natural empathy for ordinary people." This is the line pursued ever since. As the *Sun* declared last Tuesday: "There is no proof David Blunkett has done anything wrong in his role as home secretary. All we have are allegations made by a woman whom even the most impartial observer would have to admit has an axe to grind… The PM is right to give him his full backing."

But then the Murdoch press is hardly an "impartial observer" itself. Even *Sun* political editor Trevor Kavanagh, talking on Radio 5 last week, referred to suspicions that the story was "put into the public domain as a result of Blunkett's own intervention, to put pressure on Kimberly Quinn".

So how did Blunkett arrange for the *Screws* to get the story? One man who certainly knows the answer is Les Hinton, News International's executive chairman. Hinton just happens to be a good friend of one Kath Raymond, a feisty Liverpudlian who previously ran the right-wing Social Market Foundation but is now a special adviser to… David Blunkett.

IN THE autumn of 2001, soon after marrying Stephen Quinn and starting her affair with David Blunkett, Kimberly Quinn banned political pundit Bruce "the Brute" Anderson from the *Spectator* office for three months.

As we revealed in *Eye* 1038, this was because he had accosted her after a drunken lunch and yelled: "You're a cunt who hasn't been fucked for six years." As usual, the Brute could scarcely have been more wrong.

WHICH gorgeous pouting interviewer probed Tory leader Michael Howard at length in last May's *Esquire* magazine about his choice in clothes and relationship with his wife, before concluding that he "resembles Ichabod Crane – a look I find particularly sexy"?

Why, none other than Kimberly Fortier. Perhaps she just has a thing for home secretaries, past and present.

WHY was last week's high court case over David Blunkett's access to Kimberly Fortier's son heard by the relatively inexperienced Mr Justice Ryder, who was only appointed to the family division in May this year?

Every single more senior judge who might have been expected to sit in such a high-profile case has previously dealt with appeals against asylum rulings by Mr Blunkett's department – and every single one of them has found against the home office, thus disqualifying themselves from the case.

BLUNKWATCH

Happy Families

September 1999: Education secretary David Blunkett defends the emphasis on marriage in his new national curriculum. "Stability and love in relationships, expressed through marriage, is an ideal which we want to promote," he tells the *Today* programme. "Many children do not have any role models or experience of such stability. Teachers… will be setting in a framework ways in which we know that stabiliy and love can be expressed."

By the time they are studying for GCSEs, teenagers should understand "the nature and importance of marriage for family life and bringing up children, good parenting and its values for family life and strategies for resolving disagreements in relationships peacefully." A spokesman at 10 Downing Street adds that the Child Support Agency will have a role in Blunkett's crusade: "It is about sending out a signal to people that if they are going to have sex and get a girl pregnant then they need not think that is the end of it as far as they are concerned."

October 1999: Interviewed by Lynda Lee-Potter in the *Daily Mail*, Blunkett reveals why (despite his divorce) he still wears a wedding ring: it's a deterrent to amorous women. "When you come down to London and you're a new MP, you're a bit vulnerable, especially if your marriage has just broken up. So I wanted to stabilise myself rather than appear to go zany." Do flirtatious women come on heavy at parties, then? "That is a really embarrassing, intrusive, cheeky question," he says. "I'll tell you what, if anybody did they wouldn't get very far. I'm 52 and I've learned a lot. I've learned that ladies are charming friends and terrible enemies."

March 2000: Blunkett issues new guidelines "to ensure children learn about the importance of stable loving relationships, marriage, family life and the bringing up of children". It is also essential for schoolchildren to "learn the good reasons for postponing sexual activity". He explains that this guidance will "ensure that love and stable relationships are seen as key building blocks for community and society".

April 2001: Some MPs are aghast at the rumour that Blunkett will go to the home office after the general election. "He has a rather romantic view of the old working class," one tells the *Daily Telegraph*, "where everyone was thrifty, people relied on each other rather than the state, and marriage meant marriage."

June 2001: Sure enough, in his first speech as home secretary Blunkett advocates "instilling youngsters with an understanding of family, of the importance of marriage and stability for raising children". Whereas his predecessor Jack Straw had resisted pressure from churches and pro-family groups, the *Daily Telegraph* notes, "Mr Blunkett has never had any qualms in championing marriage". Interviewed by Mary Riddell in the *Daily Mail*, he is unrepentant. "I think marriage is an expression of stability," he says. "Kids need that."

October 2001: He returns to the theme with an attack on feckless fathers. "Family relationships and the values parents teach their children are vital for the future wellbeing of our society. Strong families are the core building blocks of strong communities."

March 2002: A leaked memo from one of Blunkett's civil servants reveals that the home secretary has been forced to keep quiet about his "robust opinions on the importance of marriage" so as not to offend ministers who think that "other forms of parenting… are equally able to provide children with a secure and loving environment". Blunkett has to stick with the official line that the government is merely "pro stable relationships".

April 2002: Melanie Phillips of the *Daily Mail* praises Blunkett as a man "who thinks deeply about social responsibility and the part played in it by the family". His aim, she believes, is "to inject a modicum of responsibility into family life".

March 2003: Blunkett has been brooding about problem families. "From time to time we all have difficulty as parents," he concedes, but "I just do not agree with the idea that because… your family is dysfunctional, you can do nothing about it." His solution? Wayward parents will be compelled to go on residential parenting courses. "We need to say to them, 'I am terribly sorry, but on behalf of a civilised society you are going to have to do something'."

November 2003: "I did not come into politics to be the King Herod of the Labour party," Blunkett declares. Nevertheless, he proposes that children of failed asylum seekers should be taken into care if their parents won't leave the country. Even Michael Howard condemns the idea as "despicable". The *Mirror* summarises Blunkett's policy with the headline "We'll Take Your Kids".

July 2004: Blunkett has decided that problem families must attend courses in "parenting skills" and "anger management". It's imperative to restore "respect" in society, he explains, and "I think that has to be rooted back in parenting and the family – how you build that when you are nurturing children."

August 2004: News breaks of Blunkett's affair with a married woman who is pregnant with his child. He refuses to comment, insisting that "my personal life is my business". How would he react if the same line were adopted by problem families and wayward parents as a justification for keeping David Blunkett out of *their* personal lives? We can only guess.

THE Americans refer to their most famous *émigrée* as Kimberly Fortier Quinn, and she's getting far more attention in the US media for her love life than she ever did for her work back home. But, er, what exactly *was* that work?

In the New York *Daily News*, Lloyd Grove notes that Kimberly Flexible-Surname "has been telling folks for years that she started her brilliant career as *Cosmopolitan* founder Helen Gurley Brown's secretary. She likes to recount how she was fired for keeping Truman Capote on the phone instead of passing him straight through to her boss."

Unlike the many British profile-writers who have repeated the story, Grove thought it worth checking with Helen Gurley Brown – who said she had never heard of the fragrant Kimberly under any of her surnames. "I haven't had many secretaries to begin with, and I am sure she wasn't one of them," she tells Grove. "And why would I fire someone for having a good phone relationship with Truman Capote?"

Brown adds that someone called Quinn once worked for her – "but she's now a mother of four and lives in New Jersey".

LAST IN SERIES

"Hi Honey, I'm Home Secretary!"

DAVID BLUNKETT received unstinting support from fellow Sheffield Labour MP Clive Betts, who wasted no time telling anyone who'd listen about the home secretary's honesty, sanity and capacity for hard work.

"David is an honest and caring person," Betts told the *Sunday Times*. "This is a personal issue and I am sure it is not going to affect David's capacity to do his job." Under the headline "My friend David Blunkett – a man of integrity", Betts also told the *Yorkshire Post*: "I'm sure that there are many reading this article that (*sic*) will have experienced heartache and sadness because of a relationship that went wrong. Few have faced the added strain and misery of seeing their private life put on public display."

Clive Betts is, of course, well qualified to comment on MPs who get into difficulty over the visa applications of young foreign persons. In September last year he was suspended from the Commons for a week after the standards and privileges committee concluded that he had acted "extremely foolishly" in agreeing to copy a doctored document in support of a visa application on behalf of his Brazilian rentboy lover and "researcher", Jose Gasparo.

And there is another precedent here. If Betts was guilty of forgery and deception but didn't have to resign, why should Blunkett?

ONE of the security measures introduced at the House of Commons following embarrassing demonstrations by irate fathers and then the pro-hunting lobby has been such a disaster that it has been abandoned.

The *Eye* recently reported how, barely a month after new grey passes were introduced to identify visitors, up to 350 of them had gone missing. Now the Lib Dem MP Norman Baker who first raised concerns over the issue has learnt that so many have gone missing it has been decided to abandon the idea of passes altogether.

THE shortlisted nominees for the ePolitix Charity Champion Awards, given to MPs and Lords who have campaigned on behalf of the voluntary sector, have no doubt done a lot of good work over the past year. Alas, the same cannot be said for many of the sponsors of the awards.

The award for championing older people is sponsored by the health giant BUPA. At a health select committee earlier this year, the company argued against charities, saying there was really no need for greater regulation of care homes for the elderly to prevent abuse and neglect. Reports by the commission for social care inspection into BUPA's Isard House care home found poor levels of staff training and inadequate assessment of residents' needs (*Eyes passim*).

Meanwhile the international award is supported by international mining company Rio Tinto – a company facing a catalogue of horrific allegations of human rights abuses and environmental damage in Indonesia, Australia and elsewhere.

THE department for trade and industry sent out more than 1m booklets at the end of the summer telling employers about new statutory grievance and disciplinary procedures, called: *New laws for resolving disputes: It's as simple as 1, 2, 3.*

Alas, it's not so simple as it seems. The booklet contained more than 20 legal errors and had to be rewritten and sent out again. A mere £1m later, there are concerns that the DTI booklet still hasn't got the new law right.

"In class today I'd like you to run around showing the field to prospective buyers"

"NEW" Labour's vomit-inducing Proud of Britain website is busy gathering quotes from the "public" about how terrific the government has made everything. So far it seems to have found a surprising number of party apparatchiks – sorry, ordinary punters, to praise anti-social behaviour orders, extra teachers and low interest rates.

However, after handing over name, postcode, email address and (optional) photo, the proud Briton is told: "The Labour Party may contact you using the information you supply. If you do not wish to be contacted, please write to the Data Controller at 16 Old Queen Street, London, SW1H 9HP."

Pretty much every other UK-based website asking for contact details makes use of ticky boxes to opt in or out of junk mail and email spam – with good reason since it's the law: the privacy and electronic communications (EC directive) regulations 2003, to be exact.

So, is Labour just fundamentally inept at computer stuff… or is the party desperately hoovering up contact details in readiness for massive election campaigning spam?

ROMFORD Tory boy Andrew Rossindell MP has infuriated constituents by claiming £20,000 in accommodation expenses last year – and an even more astonishing £10,000 in travel expenses, despite representing a constituency less than an hour's ride down the District Line from Westminster.

Fortunately for "Rozza" – who has had to contend with a series of unflattering articles in his local rag, the *Romford Recorder* – help is at hand in the shape of local Tory councillor Graham Price, who has penned this gushing letter to the paper: "I have been to Andrew's office in the House of Commons and it is little more than a glorified broom cupboard. I know Andrew habitually works until the early hours, which has undoubtedly proved to be hugely detrimental to his own physical well being. I keep telling him this, but that's the way he is."

By way of defence for "Rozza's" bulging travel costs, Price, onion in hand, went on to record the terrible fate that befell two MPs who didn't claim any expenses yet insisted on travelling home. "Sadly, MPs David Penhaligan and Bob Cryer were killed in tragic road accidents. Presumably it was to enable MPs to avoid those dangerous circumstances that the allowance scheme was introduced to enable MPs to have accommodation near Westminster."

PS: The chance of "Rozza" being killed in a "tragic road accident" on the District Line is negligible.

PPS: The late Bob Cryer was MP for Keighley in West Yorkshire, while the late David Penhaligan was an MP for Cornwall. Both had slightly further to travel than the absurd Essex boy – and probably managed it on less than the Romford MP claims each year for his tube tickets.

EARLY this summer rumours abounded that "Doctor" Ian Paisley was suffering from incurable cancer. Civil servants in Belfast, London and Dublin could hardly contain their joy. With the miserable old brute gone, they reckoned, his deputy Peter Robinson would take control of the Democratic Unionists and agree to accept the IRA's photographed surrender, or something like that, without rubbing Gerry Adams's nose in it.

Equally delighted at Paisley's presumed imminent demise was Belfast's increasingly desperate band of political commentators, many of whom have been driven bonkers by the failure of the peace process to follow their predictions. Newspaper and TV pundits started slagging off the old bigot, safe in the knowledge that dead dinosaurs don't sue, while puffing up Robinson. This required transforming the latter's image from that of barking nay-sayer to prospective statesman – a hard task but not impossible given the other recent rewrites of Ulster history.

But Paisley has failed to die and, though he has clearly been very unwell, has denied ever receiving a terminal prognosis. He's now seeking massive libel damages from many of those "Fenian reporters" as he calls them who had him on his deathbed just a few weeks ago and accused his family of lying to cover-up his imminent demise.

The Belfast media's sudden portrayal of Paisley as venerable peacemaker rather than dying ogre is in no way related to the faint hope that he'll drop the libel and slander claims if they arselick hard enough. Anyway, the new cuddly version of The Doc seems reluctant to turn the other cheek, so substantial payouts are likely if he survives long enough.

Another flaw in the commentators' coverage is that it's by no means certain Robinson would take over if Paisley went to meet his maker. The largely unreconstructed Ian Paisley jnr, aka Baby Doc, regards the party leadership as his inheritance and daddy probably agrees, as will most of the rank and file.

And how reconstructed is the preacher-man himself? On the official ianpaisley.org website, the most-visited article is "Vacant Seat 666", in which he reveals that the new European parliament building is designed to accommodate the Antichrist. Other popular features include a rant against Jesuits and praise for Oliver Cromwell for putting Catholics to the sword.

The site's two most recent caustic comments – "As Bush Wins, Blair Signs It Away", and "The Enslavement of a Nation: the Romanising of Ireland" – also suggest a certain lack of good will to all men, especially Taigs, Northern Ireland office civil servants and Fenian reporters.

PANICKY Oona King, MP for Bethnal Green and Bow, has been up to her old tricks with the House of Commons franking machine.

In recent months Ms King has been bombarding her constituents with all manner of unsolicited mail in a desperate attempt to curry favour and hang on to the seat at the next election. Now, to ingratiate herself with her Moslem constituents, many of them hopping mad over her support for the Iraq War, Oona has fired off a letter wishing them all "Happy Eid". Sadly a gremlin got into the works – or possibly Oona's word processor – because most of her "Happy Eid" letters ended up in the letter boxes of Sikh and Hindu constituents, who are far from amused.

MORE on the increasingly heavy-handed tactics being used to persuade North Ayrshire and Arran Labour Party to vote for itinerant special adviser and perennial seat-chaser Richard Olzewski.

Local members now claim to be receiving alarming phone calls from Olzewski's boss, health secretary John Reid, urging them to vote "for the lad". Quite how Reid finds time to intervene in such a heavy handed manner is a mystery, but Olzewski's competitors for the seat, Blairite Katy Clark and Brownite Johanna Baxter, are wondering if their bosses at Number 10 and Number 11 might be persuaded to join the fun.

***EYE* readers may recall PSCA, the publishing company that was caught out cutting and pasting speeches from the internet and passing them off as specially written introduction letters by ministers (*Eye* 1086).**

PSCA, which had to drop the full name "Public Service Communications Agency" because it was misleading, publishes a series of glossy free ad-mags distributed to high-ranking civil servants and companies involved in public sector procurement.

Now PSCA is advertising for new sales staff in the local Staffordshire press. "We have the best editorial teams in the business," claims the job ad. "That's why Tony Blair, David Blunkett, Patricia Hewitt, John Prescott, Rhodri Morgan [and] Jack McConnell have all worked closely with us."

Actually, a number of bodies, including the home office, the department for international development and the Scottish Executive have all now deliberately distanced themselves from PSCA. When the *Eye* challenged sales director Gordon Warrender last year on the cobbled together articles, he admitted: "I would be very surprised if any minister had actually written anything," suggesting ministerial contributions were all written by the press offices.

But that's not all. The job ad goes on to describe how lovely the firm is to its employees, noting: "We give them 20 days' holiday in their first year, increasing to 23 after they've been here for a while (which most of them have!!)."

Those staff who have been there a while will remember Wendy Burrows, the staff member who took PSCA to tribunal in February and won a constructive dismissal case. She described how Warrender was "unsympathetic, volatile and increasingly frightening" as a boss whose abuse of the office furniture included kicking the bin and throwing a calculator across the sales floor in anger. Have they no shame?

CHANCELLOR Gordon Brown's choice of guests at 11 Downing Street to present the "Inner City 100" awards said much about his faltering relationship with prudence.

Top of the bill at the reception to recognise entrepreneurs in areas of high unemployment was US treasury secretary John Snow, who continues to preside over his country's record budget and trade deficits and a plummeting US dollar.

Most experts think Brown's assurance that his golden rule is safe was distinctly optimistic and they fear he may soon have to admit there is more to running an economy than balancing the books. Hence perhaps his obsequious introduction of his American counterpart: "For the part you have played in strengthening America's enterprise culture and inspiring us here, John, thank you."

An equally enterprising star on the platform was Sir Fred "the shred" Goodwin, famous job-cutting chief executive of Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS). Sir Fred's support for budding entrepreneurs was tarnished the day before when consumer magazine *Which?* lodged a "super-complaint" with the office of fair trading (OFT) claiming that the big banks in Northern Ireland are ripping off their customers rotten. Chief among the alleged culprits were Ulster bank, owned by RBS, and National Australia Bank, owners of the province's Northern Bank.

Equally keen to prove his commercial credentials, treasury chief secretary Paul Boateng spoke last month at the annual conference of Partnerships UK, the privatised body that promotes the private finance initiative, on the subject of "Reducing the barriers for successful commercialisation" in the public sector. Boateng was greatly assisted by the event chairman and one of the great "commercialisers" of recent years – Sir John Chisholm, chief executive of QinetiQ, the part-privatised research arm of the ministry of defence.

QinetiQ was created in 2002 when the government sold off a third of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) to the Carlyle investment group, with a handy allocation of shares and options going to executives like Sir John. The company has proved enormously profitable, largely because the costly bits of DERA's business, like clearing up old sites, were left exclusively with the taxpayer.

The company is reported to have hired investment bank Morgan Stanley to study its readiness for full privatisation, under which Chisholm and chums are predicted to trouser a few million quid. With such a pay-day in prospect, no wonder Sir John is happy to help the government bring down troublesome barriers to the commercialisation of public assets.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Spelling is the new punctuation." — John Humphrys, the *Times*.

"Sustainable resources are the new 'sexy'." — *USP* magazine.

"Bridges are the new black." — *Regeneration & Renewal* magazine.

"Human rights are the new black." — *Independent on Sunday*.

"Modesty is the new rock 'n' roll." — Jess Cartner-Morley, *Guardian*.

"Is Cornwall the new Soho?" — *Media Week*.

"Banking is the new shopping." — HSBC advert.

"Failure – the new success in project management." — Top-Consultant.com

"Employment tribunals are the new divorce courts." — *New Statesman*.

"Could chocolate be the new cough medicine?" — BBC News online.

"Are cars the new beer and fags?" – *Guardian*.

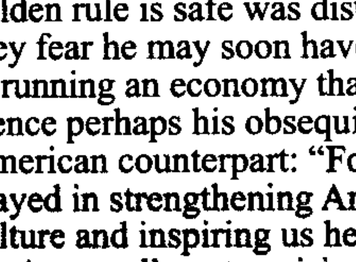
"Tweed is the new black Lycra." — Jess Cartner-Morley, *Guardian*.

AS EXPECTED, chancellor Gordon Brown announced a host of measures to counter tax avoidance schemes by multinationals and their better-paid employees, many of them unearthed by new rules requiring the accountants who sell them to spill the beans.

Such schemes, according to the pre-budget report, constitute an "unacceptable attack on the integrity of the tax system". But Gordon was silent on a tax avoidance scam he has been promising to end since before "new" Labour came to power in 1997: the loophole that allows "non-domiciled" UK residents to shelter most of their income from tax offshore.

In every budget since 1997 Brown has at least claimed that the "non-dom" rules were under review. With the most vociferous opponent of any action, his special adviser Chris Wales, recently departed to investment bank Goldman Sachs, a change this time round appeared to be on the cards. But it wouldn't pay so soon before an election to upset the many rich Labour donors who benefit from the loophole and whose goodwill is so much more important than the integrity of the tax system.

After two full Labour terms, it looks like many of the richest people in the country will carry on paying the lowest rates of tax.

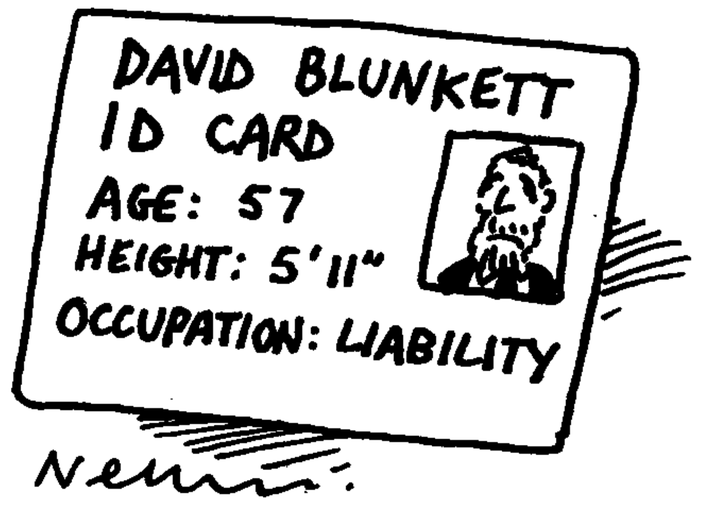


God Bless America: With God On Our Side
7.20pm Saturday 30th October, Channel 4

What makes George W Bush tick? Providing a definitive examination of the rise of the religious right in the US and Bush's own religious re-birth, which took him from heavy drinking and a failing business to set him on the path to the White House.

The Human Chimp
8.00pm Sunday 31st October, five

TV Highlights, virgin.net



FURTHER embarrassment for Geoffrey Robinson MP, who when not sitting in parliament or running the *New Statesman* moonlights as the president (and a major shareholder) in Coventry City FC. His sidekick Mike McGinnity, chairman of Coventry City, is in the process of suing one of the club's own supporters for libel.

The man on the receiving end is Neville Hadsley, who runs an online Coventry City fanzine and message-board called *Gary Mabbutt's Knee*. What made the chairman reach for his lawyers was a comment which appeared for a mere three hours on the "fan's forum" section of the site, referring to Coventry's directors as "the rogues who 'run' our club". According to McGinnity, this is a "gross libel" on the board, "most of whom have an established status in public life and whose honesty and status is and must be unimpeachable".

Can he really intend this description to include the former paymaster-general, whose exotic career in business and politics has landed him in so many scrapes (see *Eyes passim*)? Shurely shome mishtake.

LABOUR backbenchers and council leaders are beginning to despair of John Prescott.

During Labour's autumn conference, delegates voted resoundingly to create a "fourth option" for council housing, allowing tenants the option of remaining, er, council tenants. Once upon a time Labour was committed to reversing Tory plans to privatise the remaining council housing stock or transfer them to PFI schemes – but no longer! Prezza was hopping mad at the conference decision and wrote to Austin Mitchell MP telling him that he intended to ignore it.

In reply, a furious Mitchell has now informed Prezza that "I'd appreciate a personal meeting, man to mouse, without your advisers or mine because I can't honestly understand what you are about… You've got to bluff/force/con all councils into submitting privatisation plans by July next year and can't, therefore, allow any chink in your armour, any possibility of a fourth option or rationality." Prezza's reaction to the Mitchell missive is unknown, but the man known to friends and foes alike as the "Mouth of the Humber" may soon burst his banks once again.

THE effect of giving companies "preferred bidder status" on privatisation deals is clearly demonstrated by the purchase by German company Hochtief of Jarvis's PFI bidding wing.

In return for £1.2m, Hochtief gets a mere handful of staff but preferred bidder status on three major education deals to take over schools in Manchester, Cork and Northern Ireland – even though the authorities in question have had no dealings with Hochtief during tendering.

Hochtief stepped in to buy the business after French firm Vinci was put off by Norfolk council's decision to pull out of a £92m deal to hand its schools to Jarvis (see *Eye* 1116).

Jarvis is sorely in need of the cash, giving warning this week that it does not have sufficient working capital for its present requirements and may need emergency financing in January to stay afloat. The company, whose debt is 20 times its market value, was given a stay of execution by the banks until next March and is urgently trying to sell off assets, including its London Underground contracts, to survive.

ITV

I'm A Celebrity – Get Me Out Of Here! (ITV1/ITV2)

THE usual rule of media formats is that either the audience or the media begin to get bored by about the third season. The exception is comedy (*Only Fools And Horses* didn't really take off until around the general critical tipping point) but with factual television – and especially reality TV – the reactions move with some speed from "have you seen it?" to "seen it".

Big Brother, although holding on to the audience by gradual coarsening, was chucked by the pundits long ago.

I'm A Celebrity - Get Me Out Of Here! has always been an exception. Before it began, a firing squad of reviewers and advertisers was lined up to deride it as a new low for real-life soap. Four series in, there's some sign of viewer drift (audiences have not matched last year's highs) but the level of press interest has been astonishing: *IACGMOOH* has been the only story able to get more inches than Kimberly Fortier Quinn.

And, unlike *Big Brother*, which is sniffily ignored by sections of the press, the grumbles in the jungle have received coverage from red to black top. This is partly because of the presence of Janet Street-Porter, a recognisable figure to readers of the expensive press. Her inclusion is a sign that makers of reality TV have realised that, probably for the first time since *Inspector Morse*, there is a television franchise that reaches across traditional demographics: so they drop into the pudding of C-list showbiz types a little silver sixpence for broadsheet readers.

But the admission of Janet merely confirmed that the smartness of this series is in the casting. In the last two series in particular, what initially looked like desperation contestants (Lord Brocket, Paul Burrell, Peter Andre, Joe Pasquale, Jennie Bond) have turned out to be selections who provided drama and excitement. Another sign of development is that hosts Ant (tall, balding) and Dec (small, fluffy hair), who in previous series risked being mistaken for trees, seem to have been encouraged to become less like ants and more like wasps. Dec's mockery of Paul Burrell's parading of his friendship with Tom Hanks was almost worthy of being called satire.

Not everything in the rain forest is rosy, though. The introduction of Vic Reeves as a "surprise guest" early on to join his missus Nancy Sorrell was clearly a mistake, wrecking the dynamics of the camp. And the "bushtucker trials" in the early stages increasingly raise issues of human and animal rights. You don't have to be Carla Lane to wonder whether thousands of little critters really have to die by being dropped on to the head of a bloke who used to be in *Starsky & Hutch* or through being chewed and then vomited back up half-alive by a pop star or supermodel.

In fact the spectacle of stick-insect-thin young women who may well have had ingestion issues in the past being forced to munch grubs live on national TV began to look like an unacceptable form of cruelty. The producers should learn that it is tough (Street-Porter), funny (Pasquale) or self-deluded (Burrell) characters who work best in this format, not frail types with discount vouchers to the Priory.

But anyone who regrets the domination of ITV1 peak-time by *IACGMOOH* should be grateful that the main evening series is a pinnacle of innovation and intelligence in comparison with the witless interactive drivel that fills the almost-24 hour coverage from the jungle on ITV2.

This additional digital service is hosted by Mark Durden-Smith, whose ever-increasing resemblance to his mother Judith Chalmers gives the distracting impression that you are watching Jude wearing bloke's clothes and talking through a bit of a cold.

During long hours of transmission – sometimes with only one or two of the competitors conscious and within camera-shot – a question of the day is set for texters and e-mailers. It might, for example, be: Should Janet Let Paul Cook? Most of the contributors, though, go off the subject and address narrative emergencies of their own. "Fran is well fit. Luv u – Michelle, Harlow" is a typical contribution. Or: "Janet's a mouthy slapper. Joe rocks – Ron on the M25."

Weirdly, most of the messages sent have emotional sign-offs such as "I luv all of ya", presumably addressed to the other members of the interactive community, and suggesting that most of those watching the back-up coverage are either very pissed or very lonely or both. But this illiterate interactivity is necessary because anyone tuning in to see how the contestants are doing is likely to be disappointed. For minutes at a time, the muted screen displays the caption: "We apologise for the loss of sound which is due to legal reasons."

Sometimes, as the conversation touches on the sex lives of public figures, you can understand why the precaution has been thought necessary but, when it appeared during a long sequence in which the guests feared that the camp was ringed with rats, you began to suspect that the producers are now muting adverse comments about the facilities or the behaviour of ITV1.

Back on the mainstream coverage, the last surprise was the apparent disproving of the widespread assumption that the telephone voting figures are rigged to manipulate the drama. An all-male final (Burrell, Pasquale and that bloke called Fran) without the series spice Street-Porter can't have been what the producers wanted but it happened on the penultimate night. Who would think that we'd end up accusing makers of reality TV of not being cynical enough.

'Remote Controller'

Number crunching

6,000

■ Number of BBC staff who will be made redundant in latest management plans

£600,000,000

■ Cost of relocating departments to Manchester in latest management plans

MEDIA NEWS

JOURNALISTS at White City wonder why the BBC's hopeless board of governors is being asked to contribute to director-general Mark Thompson's "value for money" review.

Off the record, even their own chairman Michael Grade accepts culture secretary Tessa Jowell's view that the board of governors is "unacceptable and unsustainable".

A glance at their record confirms they know little about value for money and even less about broadcasting. They were hopeless at defending the BBC in the aftermath of the Hutton whitewash; and they were equally hopeless when endorsing the BBC's various and disastrous property ventures. With immense energy property tycoon (and governor) Dermot Gleeson backed the creation of the very same White City offices that will soon be emptied of most of their staff.

The view in W12 is that their defence of the Beeb will be just as hopeless this week when the review is published and redundancies (including their own) confirmed. "They won't know what's hit them," said a gleeful minion when Grade arrived with a brief to sort the governors out.

So why are they being asked for their "input"?

● While 54 of the 94 staff who work for BBC Property are to be made redundant, five management posts in the same division will be increased to six.

NERVOUS BBC staff who have been surfing the corporation's internal internet system in search of clues as to what the future might hold for them have been delighted to discover details of the "Technology Vision and Strategy" which will apparently ensure that "the next five to ten years will be an immensely exciting period for the BBC".

In it they are informed that "If programmes are milk, and the BBC is a milk float, then that milk float has now been customised so it can change shape, come past at any time of the day or night, and skim or even semi-skim individual bottles of milk automatically."

So that's cleared that up then!

THE SEX INSPECTORS
THE CHANNEL 4 SHOW...
THAT SETS OUT TO MAKE THE 'BRITISH BETTER' IN BED'...
SIMPLY BY...
BY DRIVING THEM TO IT EARLY
Zzzz Zzzz
Ken Pyne

HOWEVER many staff BBC director-general Mark Thompson decides to "relocate" to Manchester, theirs will not be the only removal vans the corporation will be hiring over the next few months.

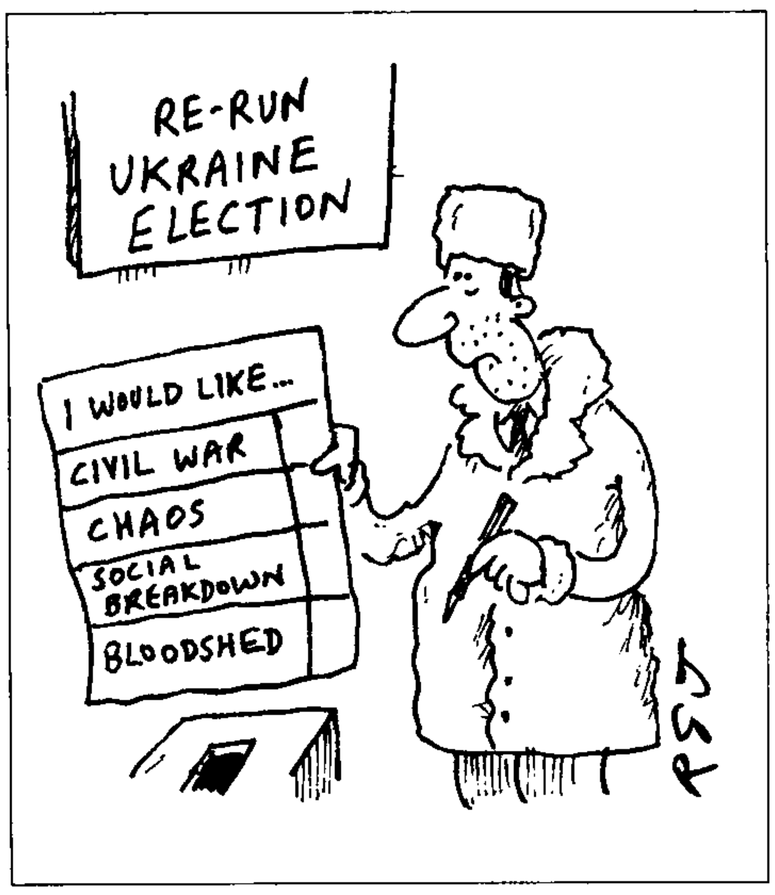
In November chairman Michael Grade announced that the BBC's board of governors would move from the new multi-million pound "media campus" at White City into the centre of London to "underline our independence from management by a powerful symbolism of physical separation." They had lasted just nine months in White City after moving from Broadcasting House in March – shattering the record previously held by the corporation's radio news division, which had been based in White City for only two years when it was announced that it would be moving back into its previous home, Broadcasting House (cost of that move: £41m).

BBC staff who find themselves relocated up north would probably be best advised to rent, rather than buy, their new homes.

THE theft of £2m worth of jewellery from the Buckinghamshire home of Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne received blanket coverage across the media.

"We worked for everything," a sobbing Sharon told a televised press conference. "I came from Brixton. Ozzy came from not a very nice part of Birmingham and everything we've got we have worked our arses off for."

Well, not quite everything. In 1965 Ozzy Osbourne was jailed for three months for burglary, after a series of thefts including an incident which he described in his autobiography as "climbing through the window of the old lady who lived next door to us".



I-SKY

"We should be thankful for Soccer AM, which is arguably the only programme on television that remembers that football is there to be enjoyed... On Sky Sports' Saturday morning show there is refreshing perspective and it is possible to combine David Seaman and a producer wearing a leotard and latex boots without making the *News of the World*."

— 1,000 word feature, the *Times*.

"If Sky Sports and British Eurosport are the Harvey Nichols and Selfridges of televised sport, Bravo is the pick 'n' mix counter at Woolworths."

— The *Times*.

"England will walk off or even go home if Mugabe and/or any of his ministers try to hijack a match for political ends. But the chances of Mugabe turning up are thought to be virtually zero. Unlike the tour here in 1996 when Mugabe was welcomed and even interviewed by Charles Colvile on Sky."

— The *Sun*.

DUMB BRITAIN

Beg, Borrow Or Steal, BBC2

Jamie Theakston: Where do you think Cambridge University is?

Contestant: Geography isn't my strong point.

Theakston: There's a clue in the title.

Contestant: Leicester.

National Lottery Wright Across the World, BBC1

Ian Wright: What type of creature is a praying mantis?

Contestant: A fish.

Wright: Are you sure you want to say fish?

Contestant *(confidently)*: Yes, a fish.

DUMB AUSTRALIA

96FM Perth, WA

DJ: Which country does Mexico share its largest border with?

Contestant: Pass.

DJ: I'll give you a clue. It's very big.

Contestant: Greece.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

"LEARNING conversations provide an opportunity to develop a shared and common language for people working together," says a 12-page booklet from the General Teaching Council (GTC).

"Learning conversations" – or people having a chat about their work in other words – are apparently the new big thing in professional development. The leaflet reveals that a survey found that 97 percent of teachers had had a "knowledge-sharing conversation with colleagues". That leaves one baffled about the other 3 percent; but at least the booklet demonstrates a great use of the £30 annual membership fee all teachers must pay the GTC.

WHAT is going on a Halton College in Widnes, where principal Graham Hilton was suspended two days before an Ofsted inspection?

Halton College last featured in *Eye* 985, in 1999, when it was fingered for over-claiming funding by £14m. The then principal Martin Jenkins spent more than £31,000 on etchings for his office and spurned train travel across France in favour of a £1,000 sports car rental while treating the college with contempt.

However, Mr Hilton has been a popular figure and has helped Halton become one of the best colleges in the region. College staff, local media and MP Derek Twigg are all baffled by the governing body's actions, while even the Merseyside Learning and Skills Council appears to be in the dark, commenting: "They don't have to explain themselves to us."

AD NAUSEAM

THE Newspaper Marketing Agency (NMA) exists to remind advertisers and agencies of the potential of newspapers as an advertising medium.

The agency is funded by all of the major national newspapers, which have a vested interest in reminding marketing nabobs that press ads are a great way to spend their money. A simple way to get this message across is to advertise in newspapers themselves, the idea being that you read it here, so that proves it works. Hence, in recent weeks the NMA has been running a print campaign across the broadsheets, as well as the *Express* and *Mail*.

No one can deny the NMA ads have caught the eye – but perhaps not quite in the way they intended: the agency itself has been reprimanded twice in the last month by the ASA, which received 81 letters of complaint about the most recent full-pager. This featured a man impaled on a stiletto heel in a pool of blood, and was apparently supposed to show that newspapers are a great way to reach a female target audience.

Many of these females were indeed reached, but they tended to react by phoning the paper in high dudgeon saying they'd rather not see bloody violence – against men or otherwise – over their morning coffee.

Regular readers of this column will not be surprised to learn that this magnificent own goal was the product of TBWA London. Doubtless the national press is chuffed that the agency it bankrolls is promoting its cause with such perspicacity and poise.

IN A recent bid to relaunch its Lux soap brand, Unilever hired actress Sarah Jessica Parker to pose in a perilously short sequin dress. Hollywood starlets don't come cheap, however, and so Parker's posters were rolled out globally to save costs. The sell was that a rub with a brick of Lux would "Bring Out the Star in You".

Unfortunately SJP's barely-there dress has brought out the Orthodox Jewish lobby in Israel, who objected strongly to the amount of SJP thigh on display in the poster and promised to boycott all Unilever brands henceforth. Lo and behold, a day later the posters had been altered, with Parker's raiment now extending some way further down and her arms covered. Unilever denied it had succumbed to pressure with the following mealy-mouthed shimmy: "The winter came suddenly. Last week it was summer. Now it's rainy and cold. Everyone has the flu."

OUT OF CON-TEXT

TOBY YOUNG's one-man show at the Arts Theatre, *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People*, is declared in its press ads to be "A Triumph – The Spectator".

Naturally, that was the verdict expressed prior to the show's opening on 16 October by the magazine's theatre critic, one Toby Young.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

MODEL SOPHIE ANDERTON RETURNS FROM THE CELEBRITY JUNGLE
AGENCY
I WAS LIVING ON HALF A BOWL OF RICE A DAY!
GOSH!
I THOUGHT YOU'D PUT ON WEIGHT!!!
YEAH··· MUST START DIETING AGAIN!

DOING THE ROUNDS

Focus on Bradford

M.D. has for some time been highlighting the bleak future for hospitals. Under "new" Labour's model of healthcare, hospitals will be places you go to if you need your head stitching back on. All other healthcare will occur somewhere "in the community".

With treatment centres already taking business away and primary care trusts crippled with PFI debts and unable to honour their contracts, hospitals are finding it ever harder to balance the books. And those who thought they could beat off the threat of closure by achieving foundation status are now realising the reverse may be true.

Bradford teaching hospitals trust (BTHT) has a £4m deficit – pretty common for many hospitals – but because it is a foundation trust it is subject to far stricter business legislation under the beady eye of Monitor, the foundation regulator, and its chair, ex-banker Bill Moyes.

Moyes has ridden into Bradford with all guns blazing, accusing the hospital and PCTs of "a flawed relationship and a determination on both sides simply to win".

There is some truth in this. As one consultant admitted: "The senior management of the hospital and the local PCTs have drawn battle lines. Some of the hospital's overspend has been rising costs and someone has taken their eye of the finance ball (the finance director has been 'retired'). The consultant contract alone cost the trust £2m.

"We've also had an 'overtrade' in acute activity (medicine) and there is this deadlock over who should pay for this. We are fed up with having to justify every acute medical admission. It's almost reaching the stage where we will be turning acutely sick patients away if they come form certain PCTs – shades of American health care. The chasm that has developed between primary and secondary care in Bradford is very worrying for the health of the population. It is all coming down to payment for widgets."

This is very similar to the Tory market experiment, where desperate hospitals offered preferential treatment to patients of GP fundholders and would count and claim for every possible item of care. Now patients get treated if their PCT is willing or able to pay, which has nothing to do with clinical need.

So what is Moyes doing about it? He's forced the cash-strapped trust to pay £50,000 a week for the services of US firm Alvarez and Marsal to carry out "a recovery assignment". A&M have been such a hit that eight senior clinicians wrote to health secretary John Reid warning that if Monitor gave A&M an extended role it would cause "irreparable damage".

There are accusations that a senior employee of A&M insisted on having a white taxi driver to take him to the airport, and staff are concerned about the power given to Moyes. As one put it: "Who regulates the regulator? He's insisting we employ A&M who paint a worse case scenario and then put themselves forward as the only people able to fix it."

A&M's track record in America isn't impressive and has been documented elsewhere. In essence, it will try to impose an aggressive business model that is completely at odds with the ethos of the NHS. To balance the books it will have to focus on core (ie profitable) business and abandon those patients who aren't, er, profitable.

As the Tories discovered, you can't keep the ideals of the NHS and run hospitals as businesses. The irony for BTHT is that its previous success in serving a very deprived, multi-ethnic community was rewarded with the foundation status that is now ripping it apart. In the current climate, any foundation trust that dips into debt is inviting an expensive and divisive visit from Moyes and A&M. The choice could then be closure or privatisation, US-style.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

THERE'S BEEN AN ACCIDENT!
QUICK, LET ME THROUGH, I'M A DOCTOR
TOO LATE...
ADMIN GOT THERE FIRST
DON'T TOUCH HIM
COULD BE COSTLY
TECHNICALLY, HE'S LYING JUST OUTSIDE OUR CATCHMENT

SIGNAL FAILURES

Darling gets SET

TRANSPORT secretary Alistair Darling has started a smear campaign... to discredit his own chief success in the job!

Kent's trains have improved since Connex was booted out in November 2003 and replaced by state-owned South Eastern Trains (SET); but the improvement embarrasses "new" Labour by highlighting the fallacy of involving the private sector in subsidised public services.

For a year there was official silence on SET. When cornered on the subject in the Commons last month, Darling said SET's performance was *worse* than the average for the whole south east. He admitted an improvement but added: "That is largely due to what Network Rail has done in reducing track delays."

Latest statistics show that in the first quarter of 2004-5 SET was *more* punctual than the average for the whole south east. The most valid comparison – between SET and the other big train operators south of the Thames – makes SET look even better. It was the most punctual operator despite having the most difficult network, which takes commuters to London Bridge, Cannon Street, Charing Cross, Victoria and Blackfriars.

SWT commuters go to Waterloo and Southern's to Victoria, Charing Cross and London Bridge; but SWT and Southern have more grade-separated junctions to minimise disruption than SET, which also depends on a hideous bottleneck west of London Bridge where a minor problem can quickly delay thousands of commuters.

Track delays for SET *have* been cut by Network Rail; but Darling forgot to say the same NR regime applies to SET's peers south of the river, who managed to increase delays while SET reduced them.

SET's job is to improve services where Connex's job was to squeeze maximum profits from passengers and taxpayers. SET boss Michael Holden found Connex's senior managers hadn't given clear leadership and replaced all but two of them. "We've now got twice as much senior management effort going into running the day-to-day railway," he told *Transit* magazine. "In many cases, good [business] processes weren't being followed. In other cases, what had been good process from BR days had gradually been allowed to wither and die."

That's the first post-mortem examination we've ever had on a train franchise. If Connex South Eastern was that bad, what's going on in franchises with a punctuality record even worse than CSE's?

Darling doesn't want to know why SET has improved because he's bent on reprivatising it. But he had the gall to tell the Commons: "I am not interested in dogma; I am interested in ensuring that we have a decent service for people using trains, which is something that they have been denied for rather too long."

THE COMMUTERS
HELLO! THIS IS THE 17:37 SERVICE STOPPING AT: 3 BROKEN SIGNALS... A SECTION OF GRAFFITI COVERED WALL... A PILE OF LEAVES... THE SIDINGS OUTSIDE THE STATION
Zzzz
Srizelda + Aki

THE Southern franchise deal agreed four years ago was to include a study of restoring the track between Lewes and Uckfield, torn up to facilitate a new road in 1969. That vandalism robbed Brighton of its second mainline to London, badly needed today.

"New" Labour now reckons that one of Europe's most prosperous regions couldn't afford the bill (possibly about £25m). Last month the residual service from London to Uckfield appeared on an official list of community railways where "too many empty seats are running up and down". Various ideas will be tried to attract more custom to Uckfield trains but the obvious one, plugging the gap to Lewes, will be ignored as it needs government money.

A similar gap in Scotland, between Airdrie and Bathgate, precludes a third rail route between Glasgow and Edinburgh. A study says restoring the track and stations would cost about £200m. The Scottish Executive is pressing ahead, and the scheme won't do any harm to Alistair Darling's chances of keeping his Edinburgh Central seat next year.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

BUG'S LIFE

VISITORS to Bath have been unable to bathe in the city's natural warm spa waters since 1978, when the Beau St baths were closed because of "uncertainty over the purity of the source" (Bath and NE Somerset council website) or "a health scare" (Bath tourism website). In fact the baths were closed after a young girl died of meningitis after bathing in the spa waters, which were found to be contaminated with various bugs.

A quarter of a century later Bath's new thermal spa – built on the site of the Beau St baths – is four years late and £24m over-budget so far (*Eyes passim*). The project has been plagued by cock-ups which are the subject of a legal dispute between architect Nicholas Grimshaw and engineers Mowlem. So news that the spring intended to supply 80 percent of the spa's water contains cryptospyridium, which can cause acute diarrhoea, weight loss and fever, has not gone down well.

Also discovered in the water supply is an organism from the hartmannella family, which can cause chest infections or the life-threatening brain inflammation, meningo-encephalitis.

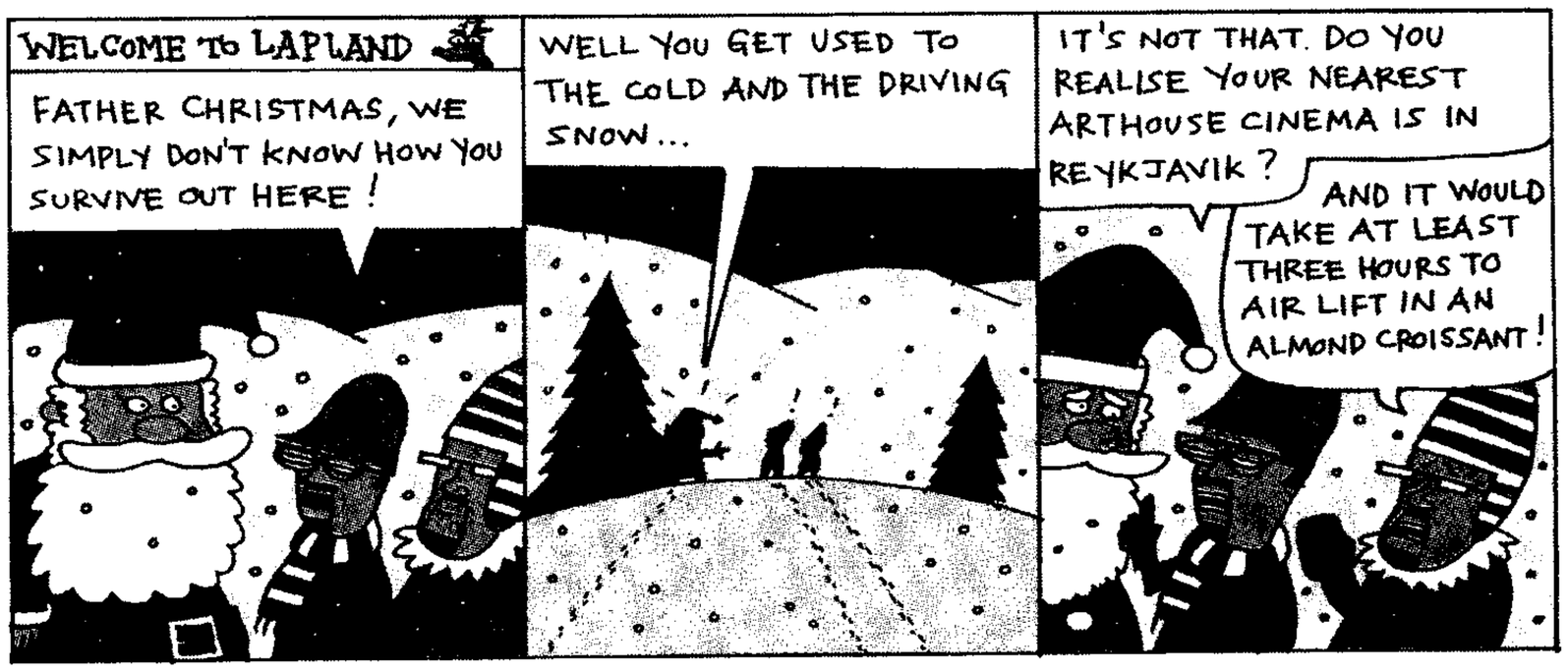
After the local TV station, TV West, broke the bugs story, Cllr Nicole O'Flaherty, Banes council's "executive member for leisure" said: "There is no life-threatening bug in Bath's spa." The spa, she said, has a state-of-the-art water treatment plant. That's quite right. It has been out of action for a year, however, and the company that installed it has gone bust. So come on in – the water might be lovely by about 2007!

● COUNCILLORS in Wales, long familiar with the concept of having to be bribed to do things, were delighted last year when the Welsh assembly came up with an even better idea: bribing them to do nothing! The assembly approved a scheme whereby older councillors would receive payoffs of up to £20,000 if they stood aside for younger candidates. Veteran Labour councillor Tyssul Lewis, 77, a former leader of Swansea city council, signed up for the scheme but died in April, 18 days before the local elections at which he was due to stand down. Under the rules there is no provision for such golden handshakes to be paid to the estate of a dead councillor; but Cllr Lewis's former colleagues are lobbying the assembly's finance minister Sue Essex to see if a way can be found.

ZIMMERING ROW

SOMETIMES politicians mean what they say and sometimes they say what they mean.

A Haringey council report on its "vision" for the future care of the elderly in the borough has some fine words about seeking "to meet the aspirations of our older citizens to maintain their independence in their own homes". What this means in practice is closing two of the borough's


IT'S GRIM UP THE NORTH POLE
KNIFE & PACKER
WELCOME TO LAPLAND
FATHER CHRISTMAS, WE SIMPLY DON'T KNOW HOW YOU SURVIVE OUT HERE!
WELL YOU GET USED TO THE COLD AND THE DRIVING SNOW...
IT'S NOT THAT. DO YOU REALISE YOUR NEAREST ARTHOUSE CINEMA IS IN REYKJAVIK?
AND IT WOULD TAKE AT LEAST THREE HOURS TO AIR LIFT IN AN ALMOND CROISSANT!

care homes for the elderly.

But not to worry: "Increasingly we can harness computer and other technology to assist people with a range of daily living tasks and to promote their safety within their home." The families of incontinent and confused oldies are now excitedly waiting for the delivery of the computers that will feed, bathe and change elderly relatives.

When on 15 November a 40-strong group of oldies, some in wheelchairs, and their relatives turned up with a poppy wreath at Wood Green civic centre "to remind our elected leaders to remember the living" and to protest at the closure of the homes, Labour councillor Sheila Peacock, the mayor of Haringey, was there to greet them.

She ordered a member of staff not to let any protesters into the building: "If they cause any disturbance, call the police. Arseholes!"

After one relative wrote to object to this treatment Cllr Peacock replied that she apologised for any "unintentional" distress she had caused, but claimed her remarks were addressed at "another group" of protesters. As there was not any other group in the vicinity at the time, Cllr Peacock's "apology" has done little to clear the air.

THE TURD WAY

MORE on the problems at council swimming pools "outsourced" to Leisure Connection (LC) in places such as Hackney, Brent, Dorking, Salisbury and Cheltenham.

Earlier this year Great Yarmouth borough council gave LC six weeks to repair broken lavatories, sinks and tiles at its Marina sports centre or face termination of its contract.

Further problems have "surfaced" at the Marina in the form of floating turds spotted by swimmers in the past few weeks. Probation officer Karen Stubbs describes bathing at the Marina as like "swimming in a sewer". Other complaints include sanitary towels and nappies left on the changing room floor, drains blocked by hair and cracked and filthy tiles around the pool.

Mrs Stubbs, who takes her eight-year-old son to swim at the Marina, said LC staff seemed unconcerned about one stool in the pool, doing nothing for 30 minutes before fishing it out with a net. Health and Safety regulations require a pool to be closed in such circumstances until all the water has been filtered and cleaned.

A Leisure Connection spokesman told the *Eye*: "A complaint received on Sunday November 21 that there was a piece of excrement floating in the pool at Marina Leisure Centre was immediately investigated by the duty manager on shift. It was discovered that the offending item was actually a brown pebble from the landscaping which surrounds the pool and this was fished out of the water. No trace of excrement or faeces was found."

Mrs Stubbs is adamant that she knows a turd when she sees one. "It definitely wasn't a pebble," she tells the *Eye*.

Last year Cheltenham axed LC for its abysmal standards of cleanliness. Will Great Yarmouth be next to decide it's not taking any more shit from Leisure Connection?

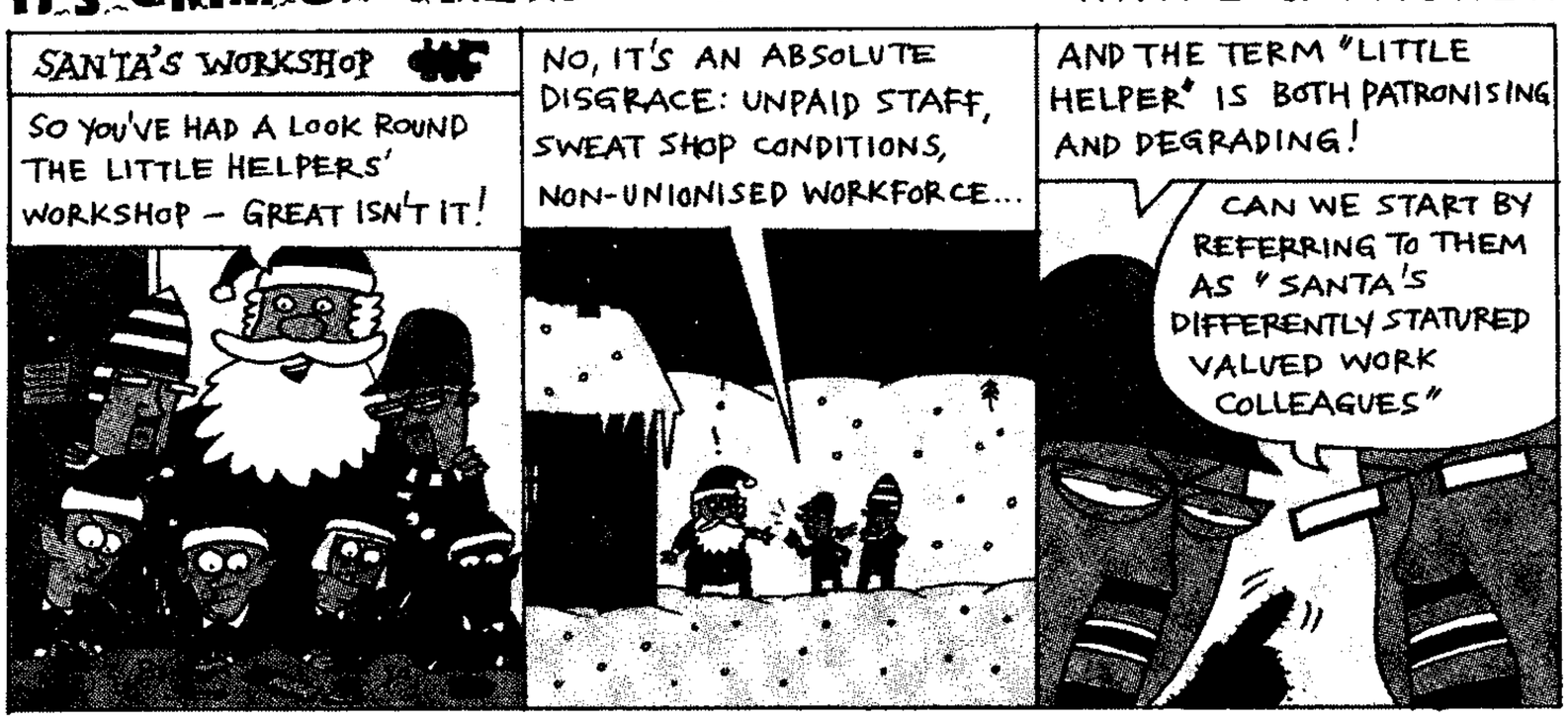
THOUGHT CRIME

MORE evidence emerges that the Standards Board for England (SBE), the watchdog set up three years ago to encourage ethical behaviour among councillors, is increasingly being used to stifle legitimate debate.

The ruling Tories on Westminster council have long sought revenge on Labour councillor Paul Dimoldenberg, the man who blew the whistle on the unlawful gerrymandering activities of "Dame" Shirley Porter in the 1980s. One of the SBE's "ethical standards officers" has spent 15 months mulling over a Tory complaint that Dimoldenberg – now opposition leader in Westminster – acted improperly in daring to suggest on the *Today* programme last year that Westminster had dragged its feet in attempts to trace Porter's hidden wealth.

(At the time Porter, who owed the council £42m in surcharges over the gerrymandering, was claiming she couldn't pay because she was down to her last £300,000. Happily she has since found a further £11,700,000 in an old handbag and has cut a deal with the council.)

Now the SBE has decided there is a case to answer. Dimoldenberg faces being banned from holding public office for five years if an adjudication panel finds against him in the new year.


IT'S GRIM UP THE NORTH POLE
KNIFE & PACKER
SANTA'S WORKSHOP
SO YOU'VE HAD A LOOK ROUND THE LITTLE HELPERS' WORKSHOP – GREAT ISN'T IT!
NO, IT'S AN ABSOLUTE DISGRACE: UNPAID STAFF, SWEAT SHOP CONDITIONS, NON-UNIONISED WORKFORCE...
AND THE TERM "LITTLE HELPER" IS BOTH PATRONISING AND DEGRADING!
CAN WE START BY REFERRING TO THEM AS "SANTA'S DIFFERENTLY STATURED VALUED WORK COLLEAGUES"

● NIGEL MAIDMENT, a Conservative member of North Wiltshire district council, is under fire for using his council email as a contact address for the posh Beaufort Hunt, of which he is secretary. North Wilts's only Labour councillor, Christine Reid, whose vote keeps the Lib Dems in control, has threatened to report him to the Standards Board for "inappropriate" use of his council email. Maidment denies any impropriety. The council agrees. "The monitoring officer's view is that it does not contravene our email policy," a council spokesman tells the *Wiltshire Gazette*. So that's all right, then. "However, the council is not allowed to be seen to promote any political issue. This clearly could be viewed as such." So that might not be all right, then. "Cllr Maidment has agreed to remove the email address." Er, right, then.

NOOKS and CORNERS

CAN anything resist the steady, constant growth of supermarket chains? Certainly not local authorities; and governments, whether Conservative or Labour, seem ever more besotted by the likes of Tesco and Sainsbury and anxious to help make the world safe for supermarkets.

Though 86 percent of all food in Britain is now bought in them, the chains won't rest until they control every outlet. And the ones they have already, they simply want to make bigger – as is the case in Marlow, that genteel, affluent and handsome old town by the Thames in Buckinghamshire.

Since 1971 Messrs Waitrose, the respectable supermarket arm of the John Lewis Partnership, has had a smallish store in the centre. It is situated in West Street, an old street with more than 100 listed buildings. In 1995 Waitose proposed to enlarge the store while reassuring the public that (what remained of) the listed façade (which Marlow urban district council stopped the company demolishing in 1970) would be retained "thereby maintaining the character of Marlow" and that "particular care has been taken to ensure the building will complement its surroundings."

This proposal came to nothing. But now, eight years later, Waitrose has submitted a planning application to double the size of its shop and demolish its street front, replacing it by a new precinct designed by Lyons & Sleeman & Hoare which will contain six new shops and 16 flats. This proposal is strongly opposed by the local chamber of trade and by the Marlow Society, while English Heritage is critical (CABE, of course, "would be happy to see this scheme go ahead"), yet Marlow town council voted in its favour.

However, there is a significant obstacle to the expansion plan in that some of the land required is owned by the Sawyer Funeral Service, a family business which has been operating from its site in West Street since 1925. This firm has made it clear it has no wish to move, and certainly not to the site proposed by Waitrose: a council-owned car park which is zoned for residential use in the Marlow town plan.

There is, however, a way of getting rid of the tiresome Sawyer Funeral Service: the compulsory purchase powers which can be exercised by the local authority. The local authority is Wycombe district council, which has already been organising "public consultations" on behalf of Waitrose (and using the chain's own planning consultant, Barton Willmore, which seems a little cosy). But a compulsory purchase order should only be used when there is a compelling case in the public interest, and it is hard to see why it is in the public interest to displace one business to benefit another (bigger and more powerful) one – especially when there is much local opposition to the supermarket plan.

So will Wycombe council have the guts to say no to Waitrose? Most unlikely.

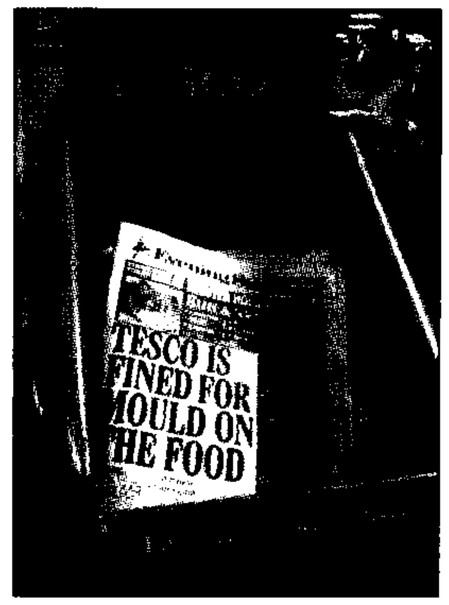
MY PICTURE is a pathetic one. It shows how the Burns Monument in Kilmarnock looked until recently.

This rumbustious Scottish baronial pile was designed by Robert Ingram to shelter a statue of the poet by W.G. Stevenson and was erected in Kay Park in 1878-79 by public subscription. But the popular and patriotic impulse to commemorate Robert Burns in the town celebrated for publishing his poetry means little to the authorities today.

Long neglected by East Ayrshire council, which was more interested in promoting housing developments for the site, and surrounded by a 10ft-high steel fence, this extraordinary stone structure somehow managed to "go on fire" (as they say in Glasgow) a few weeks ago. Much of it has now been demolished and the rest will soon be cleared away, rendering the monument both out of sight and out of mind and thus relieving the council of its tiresome responsibilities.

And, speaking of Glasgow, I hear that the former Elgin Place Congregational Church, lately converted into the "Shack" and "Trash" nightclubs, has just gone on fire. The interior had long gone, but the exterior is a handsome Greek Ionic temple designed by the elder Burnet and built in the 1850s. So will this gutted listed building now be restored? Judging by Glasgow's usual treatment of its historic buildings (Eyes passim ad nauseam), highly unlikely. The congregation which leases one of the city's (and Scotland's) greatest architectural treasures, Greek Thomson's St Vincent Street Church, has long been pressing its landlord, Glasgow city council, to install fire detection and prevention equipment – but in vain. Perhaps the council might consider doing this now?

'Piloti'

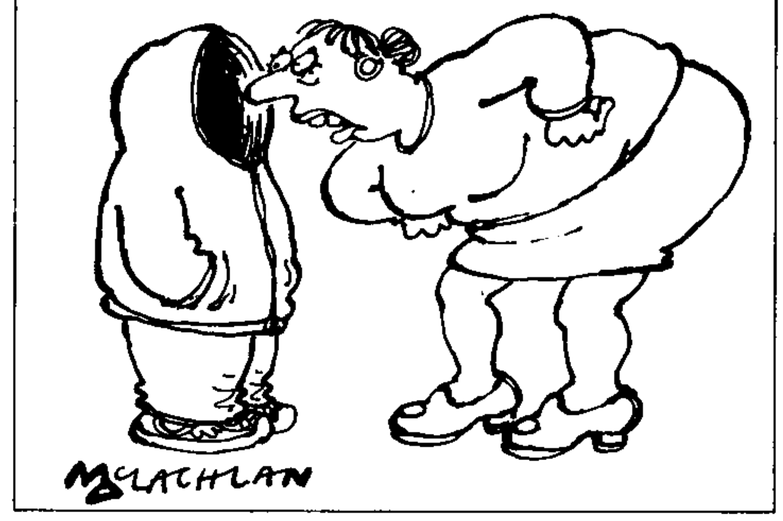


I-SPY

Hammersmith, London

Submitted by Quin Parker. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

"It's no use, Darren – I know you're in there!"



MUSIC & MUSICIANS

STROLLERS in South Kensington a few weeks ago will have been surprised to see a motley gathering on a traffic island by the tube station that included a brass band, a demented tenor warbling like a lunatic, the self-styled music critic David Mellor making windbag speeches, and the Rt Hon Michael Portillo MP looking deeply embarrassed.

They were there for the unveiling of a statue to Bela Bartok. And if you ask why there should be a statue to the composer in South Ken, it's a good question. Bartok never lived in London: he just visited occasionally. But the statue – like the traffic-stopping concert and a mad, singing procession through the streets (Portillo looking even more uncomfortable) – was organised by one Malcolm Rudland: a certifiably bonkers character on the wayward fringes of the music world who for years has run the Peter Warlock Society, dedicated to the dipsomaniac minor composer who dabbled in black magic and gassed himself to death.

Rudland is also notorious for trying to set up naked motorcyle rallies in honour of PW as well as giving naked radio interviews to advertise them. He also organises Peter Warlock walking-tours of Hampstead, even though PW had no connection with Hampstead. And the Bartok statue? Er, that was because Bartok and PW were friends. Well, sort of.

You might think Rudland's antics are harmless enough, but they have landed him in trouble with his own society which, weary of acting as a conduit for his obsessions, voted Malcolm out of office at the last AGM. The problem is he won't go. Ignoring the fact that there is now a new secretary, he has refused to hand over the membership list and continues to use it for his own purposes as though he were still in charge, issuing thunderous denunciations of the chairman and trying to gather support for a *putsch* to oust the democratically elected committee.

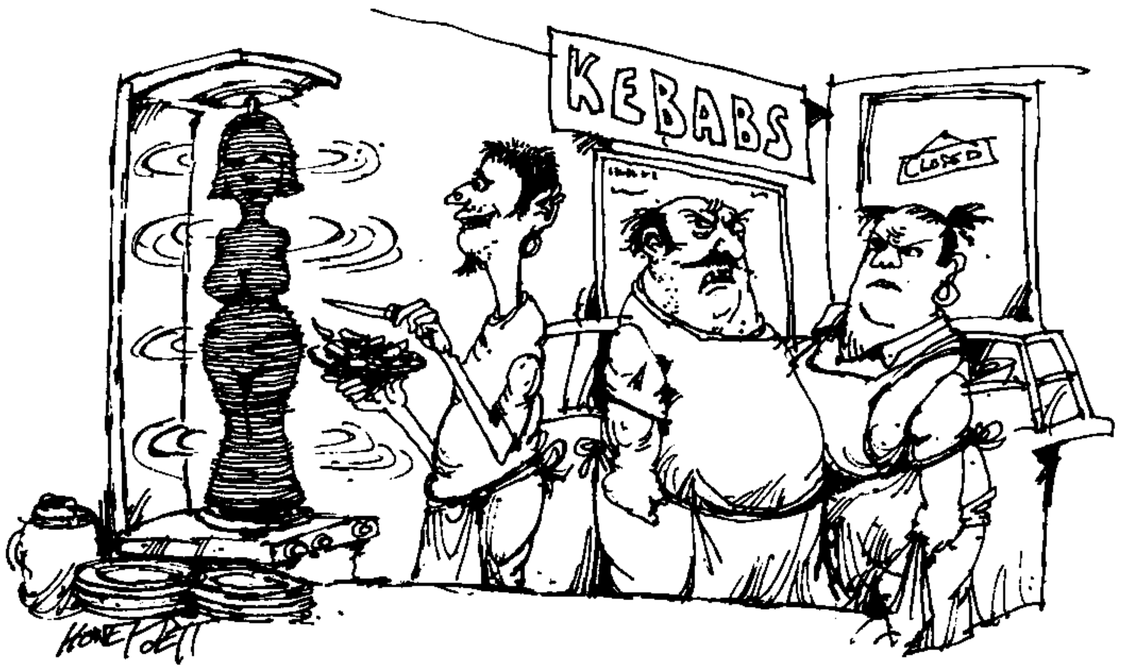
As a result the Peter Warlock Society is in total disarray and, in the words of one angry member, looks like emulating its hero. "I fear we're turning on the gas," he said, envisaging an end to all the naked cycling and pointless statues. Cause for regret? Perhaps; though Warlock urged his friends and followers to feel nothing of the kind. The composer (who enjoyed devil-worship, drinking, debauchery and being an Old Etonian) only admitted to one regret in his life. That he had never tried buggery.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

At least our art's still in its rightful place...
ARTS NEWS
SAATCHI "OFFERED ENTIRE COLLECTION TO TATE, BUT SEROTA TURNED IT DOWN."
The newspapers!
"NO I DID NOT!" – SEROTA
ANOTHER BRITART SPAT! CHARLES V. NICK – AGAIN



"We should never have let him go to that art school"

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE new European Commission is barely a fortnight old, yet the whiff of scandal is already wafting through the corridors of Brussels.

Following revelations that new transport commissioner Jacques Barrot has a conviction for embezzlement that he forgot to reveal, Neelie Kroes, the new competition commissioner, has also been the subject of angry exchanges.

Kroes was a Dutch transport minister until 1989 and then an adviser to the European transport commissioner. She left public office to become a board member or adviser to some 30 companies, including McDonalds, Volvo and phone firm MMO_2. While the possibility of her making rulings involving these firms has been highlighted, the anti-corruption MEP Paul Van Buitenen and others are more alarmed by her past involvement in a tanker cleaning scandal.

As Dutch transport minister Kroes gave about £9m in subsidies to help found Tanker Cleaning Rotterdam, a firm which took dangerous polluted water and fluids from ships. The firm's owners, the Langeberg brothers, were successfully prosecuted for dumping toxic waste in the harbour; and chemical detritus was also illegally shipped to Britain.

Kroes says she gave the money innocently, not knowing that the brothers' other firm, Tanker Cleaning Amsterdam, was under investigation for environmental crimes. She denied any improper contact with the Langeberg brothers; but when asked by MEPs about the Dutch parliament's finding that she behaved "negligently and reprehensibly" in the affair, Kroes merely replied that the "public prosecutor dismissed the case".

Kroes also denied misbehaviour in the 1994 sale of warships to Abu Dhabi. She led a Dutch consortium making the sale and was accused by a Dutch television programme of bringing a close friend and business contact into the deal, risking the sale and proposing tax evasion. Kroes told MEPs she had done nothing wrong and her letters in the affair had been misinterpreted. She also rejected Van Buitenen's other claims as "character assassination".

A NEW computer system essential for countering financial fraud in the European Union is supposed to come into operation on 1 January. Yet when *Private Eye* asked the commission if, with less than a month to go, it was ready, the answers were worryingly equivocal.

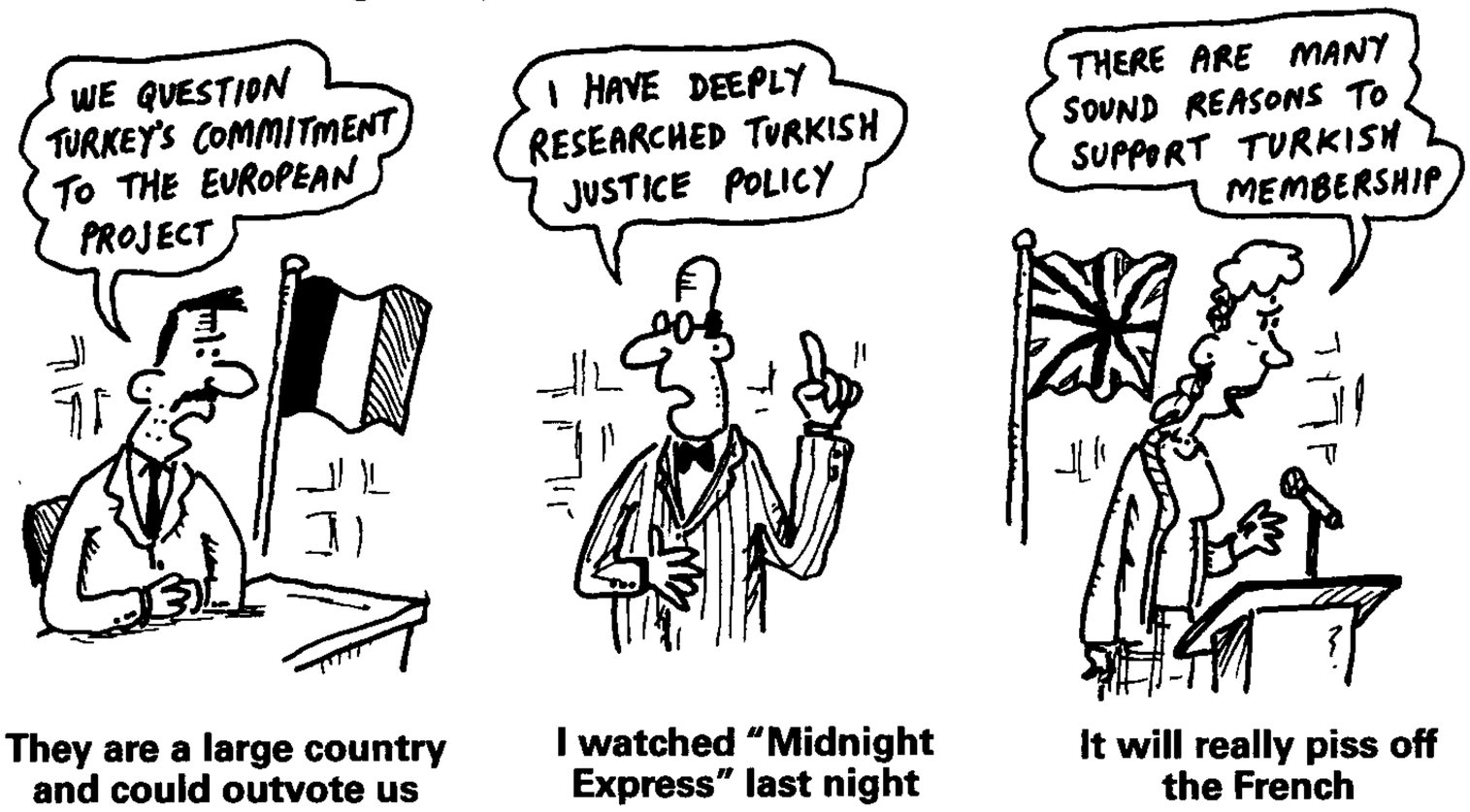
At the moment the EU does not even use double-entry book keeping (invented in the 15th century) which makes fraud prevention easier. And in November the court of auditors refused for the umpteenth year running to sign off the EU budget because of "material errors" and "no reasonable assurance that the supervisory systems and controls of significant areas of the budget are effectively implemented".

Hence the need for the new system is paramount and the "Modernisation of the Accounting Systems" timetabled to go online in January is an essential first step. Yet when the *Eye* asked a string of questions based on a confidential feasibility study carried out for the European Commission last year, the response was far from reassuring: "Subject to the risks associated with any major IT project... the deadline will be respected."

One issue raised by the study, which was produced by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), was that data cleansing should be completed before the new system went online. Asked if the data was now clean, the commission replied vaguely that "implementation of their plans for cleansing data... have been monitored by DG Budget, and materially all the work necessary to support day-to-day accounting functions is expected to be completed by 31 December 2004."

In short, don't expect fraud control to get better any time soon.

EUPHEMISMS: Letting Turkey Into The Club


WE QUESTION TURKEY'S COMMITMENT TO THE EUROPEAN PROJECT
I HAVE DEEPLY RESEARCHED TURKISH JUSTICE POLICY
THERE ARE MANY SOUND REASONS TO SUPPORT TURKISH MEMBERSHIP

They are a large country and could outvote us

I watched "Midnight Express" last night

It will really piss off the French

Down On The Farm

LIKE a comet, the foot-and-mouth catastrophe of 2001 continues to leave a long tail behind it.

Chancellor Gordon Brown cannot have been pleased to be told by the European commission that it has finally decided to withhold £600m of the money claimed by the treasury from Brussels for its costs in handling the epidemic. This was because the commission ruled that the UK government had spent way over the odds, not least on buying the acquiescence of farmers in allowing some eight million healthy animals to be illegally slaughtered in the "pre-emptive cull".

As this column frequently reported at the time, this pre-emptive slaughter – the brainchild of Professor Roy Anderson – was unlawful because the Maffia had no legal authority to destroy animals unless they had been directly exposed to infection. Only now is the final bill for this unprecedented breach of the criminal law being presented to the British public, amounting to around £25 for every taxpayer in the land.

Another aftershock of the events of 2001 is highlighted in a new book, *The Killing Pens*, published by one of the heroines of that awful time, Janet Hughes, a teacher from mid-Wales. Miss Hughes tells how, in July 2001, she was so appalled by the decision of the Welsh assembly to slaughter 20,000 sheep on the Brecon Beacons when the epidemic was all but over, that she decided to intervene. The local farmers seemed quite happy to see their sheep destroyed for no apparent reason because the compensation offered was much more than their animals' market value: some of those same bribes which have now cost UK taxpayers £600m.

Miss Hughes acquired a small flock on the Beacons, to give her legal status, and sank her life savings into hiring lawyers to fight the assembly's decision, on the grounds that the mass-cull was both unnecessary and illegal. When Defra saw the implications of her action, it took over the case, asking for it to be heard in the high court in London. Miss Hughes chillingly describes how, at the last minute, Defra submitted a new witness statement endorsed by Defra's chief vet, Jim Scudamore, which seemed to blow her case out of the water. It showed that in one case no fewer than "140 rams" had all been found clinically diseased. This, according to the statement, indicated "a heavy weight of infection".

Even Miss Hughes's barrister was knocked sideways. The judge wasted no time in dismissing her case. Miss Hughes was left owing Defra £17,000 in legal costs. Only when the case was over did she set out on a detective trail to discover where those infected rams could have come from. She tracked down the site where they had allegedly been slaughtered and the farm from which they were supposed to have come. It became obvious there was no way so many rams could have been included in the sheep slaughtered in that area: that there could have been as many as 140 was physically impossible. It seemed those infected animals which had swung the case were a complete fiction.

To anyone who followed Defra's conduct at that time in detail, Miss Hughes's story will not come as a surprise. But it is good to have this particular example on permanent record.

'Muckspreader'

• *The Killing Pens* can be bought from Laurels Cottage, Churchstoke, Montgomery, Powys SY15 6SR for £14 inc postage, cheques to Save Our Sheep.

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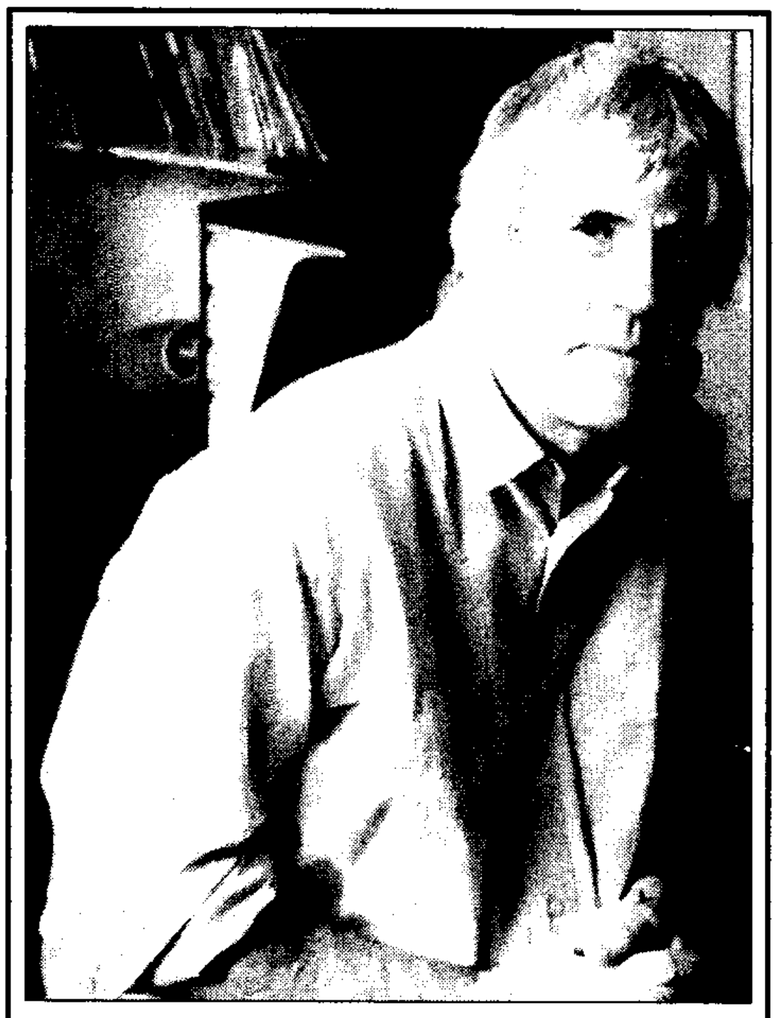
3 Islamic tower connected with a mosque from which a muezzin proclaims the adhan five times each day and for Friday pubic worship (7)

Daily Telegraph



THE PAUL FOOT AWARD 2005

Private Eye and The Guardian are delighted to announce that they are jointly inaugurating a new award in memory of the late Paul Foot. The Paul Foot Award will be given annually for the best Investigative or Campaigning Journalism of the year and will be given to an individual or team of journalists writing about Britain. The award will come with a £10,000 bursary to assist the winner in their work. The first award, The Paul Foot Award 2005, will be presented in October 2005 and entries should be submitted by August 2005.

Full details of the entry procedure can be obtained from The Guardian or Private Eye.

PFI NEWS

NEARLY a year after the *Eye* revealed the burgeoning industry in flogging off private finance initiative projects for enormous tax-free profits, the national audit office (NAO) is looking at the issue.

Once a PFI facility is up and running there can still be up to 30 years to run on a deal, with a nice stream of government-backed income guaranteed. At this point the consortium behind the PFI can sell its stake in the "special purpose company" with which the public sector body has contracted, often realising many times its initial investment.

The private sector then keeps all the profit on the sale, which companies argue is justified as they have to take the risk of building the school, hospital or road in the first place.

But the evidence from sales of shares in several PFI companies – like that by construction firm Carillion of its stake in the Darent Valley hospital PFI last year – is that the returns far outstrip any risk, offering more evidence that PFI deals require the public sector to pay over the odds throughout the contract.

There are now calls for at least part of the gains to be handed back to the taxpayer in the same way that PFI companies have to give up half their windfalls from "refinancing" deals (when they replace expensive loans with cheaper ones).

It was only two years ago that the treasury was persuaded that refinancing windfalls belonged in part to the taxpayer. And the *Financial Times* reports that Gordon Brown is similarly reluctant to upset his friends in the PFI industry by taking away any of their profits when stakes in PFI companies are sold on. The prospect of clawing back some public money from over-priced contracts is much less important than encouraging industry to enter as many PFI deals as possible so the chancellor's public spending promises can be met (without costing anything for a few years).

The NAO may take a different view, however, judging by the opinion offered by its head of PFI, Jeremy Colman. "If it is true that refinancing gains are, in part, attributable to the public sector clients, then some of the equity gains may be too," he declared. But Mr Colman will face a battle against a powerful alliance of government and industry before his reasoning is translated into money back to the taxpayer.

ACCORDING to a report issued by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), the true cost of the Norfolk & Norwich private finance initiative (PFI) hospital is £1.16bn – a *fivefold* increase on the original £229m cost.

The report was written by Jean Shaoul and Pam Edwards of Manchester University, Shaoul being a longstanding critic of PFI; but the report was backed by ACCA, the professional body for public sector accountants.

So what are local ill people getting for all this money? The Norfolk & Norwich opened in 2001 but just three years later it has had to spend another £7m converting premises leased from the nearby Food Research Institute to accommodate extra pathology labs because the new hospital isn't big enough.

The hospital tells the *Eye* that the expansion is "nothing to do with the PFI" and that "space in pathology is too small because the NHS Plan of 2000 increased the amount of patients we treat after the PFI was commissioned". However, the fact that there was no room for expansion suggests the builders were at best ungenerous with their new building: the new labs will also contain a new radiology centre.

AS THE leading financial adviser to the health industry, PricewaterhouseCoopers must have been delighted when the prime minister announced a doubling of the number of operations to be performed by independent sector treatment centres (ISTCs) when he wins his third term.

PwC has already been a big beneficiary of government health policy. Along with its private finance initiative consultancy, it recently performed the extensive review work required for the first wave of foundation hospitals. Before that it provided the department of health with initial costings for the diagnostic treatment centre (DTC) initiative. The happy conclusion was that DTCs, many run by private health firms, should go ahead.

The prospect of more foreign companies seeking to tap into the UK healthcare market, demanding the kind of advice only experts like PwC can provide (for a suitable fee), is in no small part thanks to the efforts of the DoH's strategy unit, which counts foundation hospitals, local finance improvement trusts (LIFTs) and various other quasi-privatisation policies among its triumphs. The unit is headed by one Simon Leary who until joining the department was for many years a senior figure in… PwC!

WASHINGTON (AFP)
03/11/2004 22:20

Bush réélu président des Etats-Unis et appelle à l'unité

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france-info.com

"I left the French mistress in charge of the citizenship lesson"

Russell

Paul Foot Remembered

ON 10th October 2004, a capacity audience filled London's Hackney Empire for *Our Left Foot,* a show which celebrated the life and work of Paul Foot. You can now buy a 106-minute DVD of the edited highlights of the evening. The DVD includes archive footage of Paul's appearances on *Question Time* and some of his television investigations and talks. There are also contributions from Tony Benn, Rory Bremner, Michael Foot, Jeremy Hardy, Gareth Peirce, John Pilger, Mark Steel, Richard Ingrams and many others, including half a dozen people from the miscarriage of justice campaigns with which Paul was associated.

The DVD costs £14.99, including p&p to UK addresses. You can buy it with a credit card over the phone (020 7939 3187) or on the web by emailing ourleftfoot@fulcrumtv.com

Letters

Arafat's fortune tellers

Sir,

It's rare that you print utter bollocks, but the "Number Crunching" concerning Yasser Arafat's purported $6.5bn "personal fortune" is a nonsense.

The channelling of reconstruction funds to the Palestinian Authority via a network of Arafat's personal bank accounts was set up in total agreement with – and at the insistence of – the EU. This is standard practice in channelling aid to unstable areas, third-world countries, etc, and recognised by bodies such as the UN, World Bank and IMF as wholly necessary, if not exactly desirable.

The idea is that you give the trusted recipient, in this case Arafat, total control over how the funds are spent, and thereby prevent the money being siphoned off by undesirable elements (eg Hamas) or used for undesirable purposes (such as to fund terrorism). Arafat's "private" bank accounts were created for this purpose with the full knowledge of the donor nations. Stuck in virtual imprisonment by the Israelis, Arafat was not exactly noted for his lavish lifestyle.

Why not do some number crunching on how many stone-throwing Palestinian children have been murdered by the occupying Israeli army as a ratio to Israel's military casualties? Or is that not contentious enough for the Eye these days?

Yours,
JACK HOLLAND,

Cheltenham.

Sir,

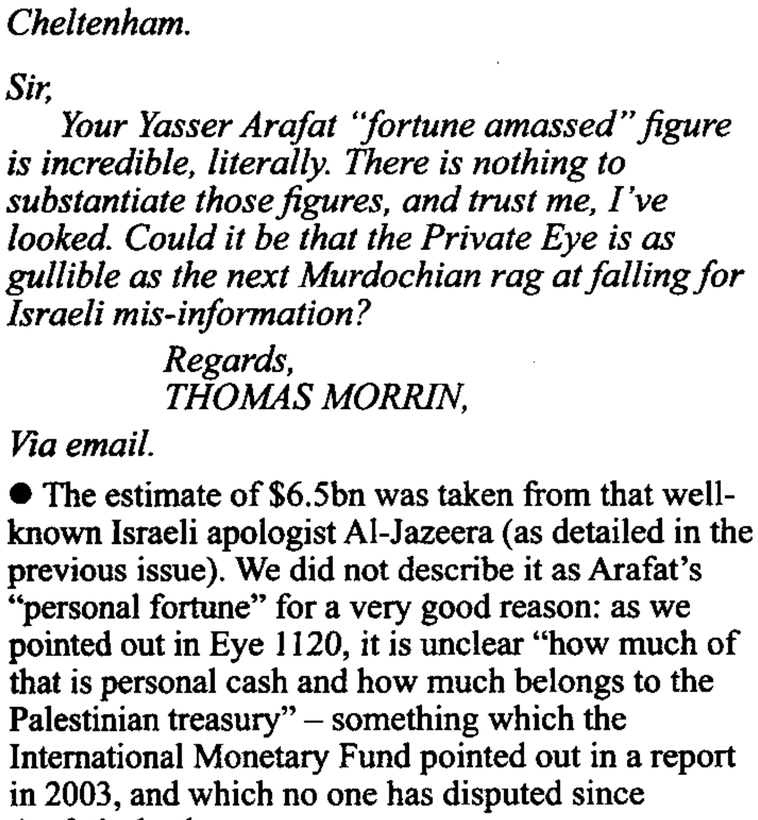
Your Yasser Arafat "fortune amassed" figure is incredible, literally. There is nothing to substantiate those figures, and trust me, I've looked. Could it be that the Private Eye is as gullible as the next Murdochian rag at falling for Israeli mis-information?

Regards,
THOMAS MORRIN,

Via email.

● The estimate of $6.5bn was taken from that well-known Israeli apologist Al-Jazeera (as detailed in the previous issue). We did not describe it as Arafat's "personal fortune" for a very good reason: as we pointed out in Eye 1120, it is unclear "how much of that is personal cash and how much belongs to the Palestinian treasury" – something which the International Monetary Fund pointed out in a report in 2003, and which no one has disputed since Arafat's death.

Still, it is refreshing to be accused of being pro-semitic for a change. Ed.



"We're improving our PR"

Honest response

Sir,

I am an avid reader of your magazine, when I occasionally get round to buying it, but do not subscribe as to have so much cynicism perpetually in my life would probably drive me to suicide. Your feature cartoon "Scenes You Seldom See" reminded me that there is some honesty in the world, in spite of what the content of your publication would have us believe. Imagine the scene: I am visiting my 89-year-old father, who lives alone, fiercely independent. He has inquired about prices for solar heating. The company phones to arrange an appointment. Significant grants are available, but they advise that payback is about seven years for an average household. Is he sure that he wants to pursue it?

Yours, in hope that Spring's eternal,
BILL COLOMBI,

Via email.

Lookalike

Updike

Dolly

Sir,

There is a striking similarity between Dolly th Sheep and top American novelist John Updike. Do you think that by any chance he has been cloned?

Yours in clover,
PAUL KENNEDY,

Twickenham, Middlesex.

Cutting the mustard

Sir,

Re: It's Grim Up North London. I refer to Eye 1120 and wish to inform you that my deputy (and former district medical officer) has confirmed to me that whilst "Mustard and Bergamot Compress" is indeed far cheaper than the defibrillators we currently use for heart attack victims, nevertheless he has been unable to verify that it was evidence-based medicine (EBM).

For that reason it was necessary to remove the two volunteers, Quinn and his friend, from frontline duties.

I trust this explains the matter fully.

Yours faithfully,
PAUL PETROVITCH,

Commander, St John Ambulance, London (Prince of Wales's) District.

LUVVIES

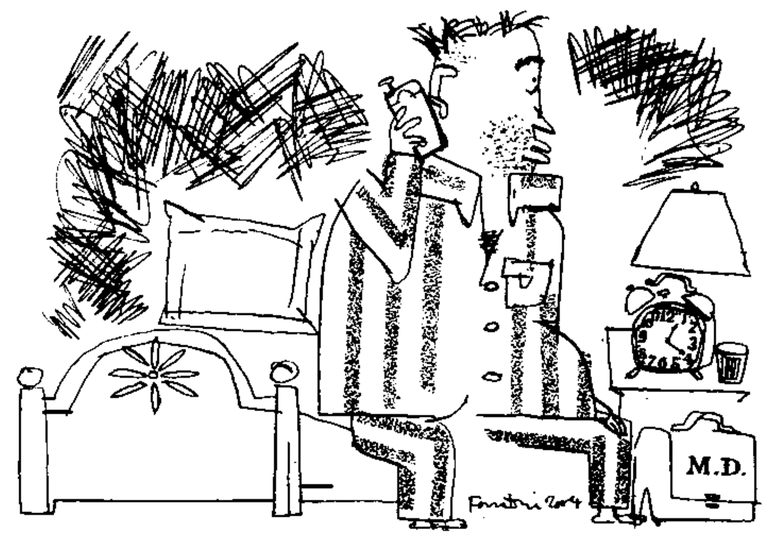
"You don't want to get to the point where someone hands you a sketch and you go off and do it. You want to be able to say, 'That's not good enough, have another go.' I love that side of it, the creative side."

ANTHONY McPARTLIN
(of Ant and Dec),
Business Life

Submitted by Robin Petherbridge

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Sounds like a cold, but I'll come out and take a look, just to make certain"

Eye-Sky

Sir,

Whatever has happened to Lord Gnome? Since when does one open Private Eye (Eye 1120) and find a colour ad for Sky TV on page 2 and not a word from Lord Gnome on page 3?

Sinister, that's what I call it – and I've been subscribing since 1976.

Yours etc,
PETER NEEDHAM,

NSW, Australia.

Sir,

Further to Paul McIntyre's letter, I happened to notice an entry to I-Sky on the inside cover of your organ. Buy Sky, where you can receive great channels such as Sky News and Fox News. Seeing as no one in their right mind would watch either, I'm greatly disappointed in your magazine and am considering cancelling my subscription. etc.

Yours,
EDWARD GILCHRIST,

Via email.

Grove's dictionary

Sir,

In defence of Valerie Grove (Pseuds Corner, 1120), I didn't go to Peel's funeral but, whilst I wouldn't argue that Arafat was more important than Uncle John in the greater scheme of things, John Peel changed more in my own life than Yasser Arafat did and so was as revolutionary on a personal level. Call me misguided but I don't think Valerie Grove was a pseudo.

Cheers,
JOHNNY CHAPMAN,

Via email.

Booze talk

Sir,

I read your article in Eye 1120 about the delay Leyhill inmates had to endure when trying to restock with liquid stimulants from their local shop.

The local shop, now in its tenth year, is operated solely by volunteers for the benefit of the community. Define that community as you will, but it's not easy to distinguish a Leyhill inmate as they are not attired in regulation, stripped convict garb. Perhaps Mr Blunkett will note this oversight and so, hand-in-hand with ID cards, he could reintroduce sensible convict clothing. Thus, the local shop staff would be able to spot Leyhill inmates and suggest politely to them that perhaps something softer would be more appropriate!

Shame about the loss of business though!

JOHN SIDGWICK,

Honorary treasurer, Cromhall Village Shop.

CABE omission

Sir,

Re: Piloti's column on CABE. The content of the column was dishonest by omission. There were two particularly salient points that Piloti failed to mention.

First, the independent audit into our governance published in the summer concluded that there was no evidence of wrongdoing and that CABE had taken reasonable steps to ensure it was compliant with the Nolan principles of probity in public life. You would not have gathered from Piloti that this was the case.

Second, when we reviewed the development proposal in Croydon by our former chairman's company, Stanhope, we made a number of criticisms, though we welcomed it in principle. Our criticisms were quite serious; when the proposal was rejected on appeal, the planning inspector cited CABE's comments as reasons for refusal. In other words, far from giving our former chairman a sweetheart review, we gave an honest assessment which led to the scheme's refusal. Again, you would never have known this from reading Piloti's article.

PAUL FINCH,

Acting chair, Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.

Lookalike

Kruger

Richards

Sir,

I have been afraid to go to sleep recently after watching a Rolling Stones comeback tour video. Could this be in any way due to certain resemblances?

JOHNNY WOOD

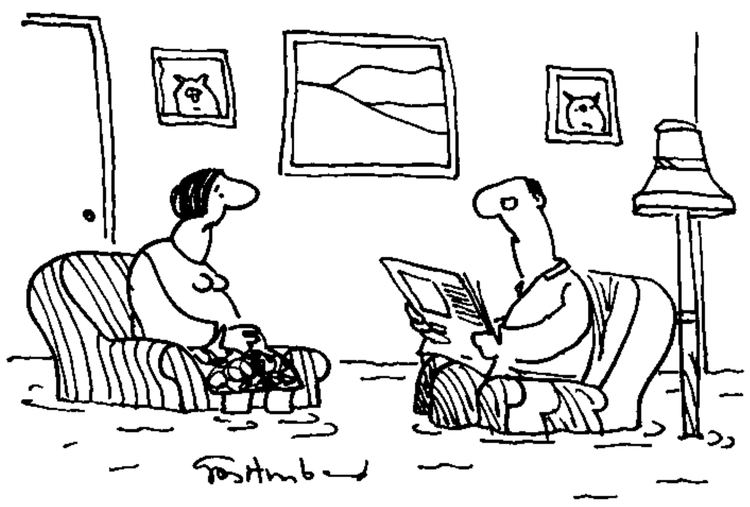
Via email.

Before Madonna, all women had to look up to was Thatcher's pussycat bows. After Madonna, we had bra straps in the boardroom. Madge, every time I change the colour of my hair, I salute you.

ROSIE MILLARD
Daily Mail

Submitted by J. James

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.



"Alright, alright.. if it gets any higher, I'll ring a plumber"

Deer stalking and MMR

Sir,

Bitterness oozes from every line of Private Eye's attack on me (Eye 1120), essentially for my having the temerity to expose the facts that lurk behind a campaign by Private Eye and certain other publications to generate aggressive, cheap copy by knocking the MMR vaccine.

The Eye attacks me for my Channel 4 Dispatches documentary of November 18, which revealed some of the embarrassments at the heart of an effort by a small group of nameable individuals who have tried to damage public confidence in MMR. This follows similar attacks on me in Private Eye earlier this year after my Sunday Times journalism led to the retraction of published claims of a possible link between MMR and autism.

In neither case did Private Eye attempt to contact me – perhaps for the purpose of asking for my evidence, or, heaven forbid, getting my response to what it proposed to publish.

If Private Eye won't engage with a journalist, perhaps it might engage with the concerns of the parents who featured in our programme: one couple whose daughter died horrifically from measles; and another who mistakenly blamed themselves for their daughter's autism, after being led to believe by media such as yours that it may have been their own decision over vaccination that was responsible for her disorder.

There can be few subjects laying a greater responsibility on those who seek to intervene with apparent authority. If Private Eye can't engage with evidence that, in my opinion, shames its reputation, it's time it joined its former allies in certain newspapers, and if not apologise for its role in the MMR scare, then at least move on.

BRIAN DEER,

Twenty Twenty Television, London NW1.

Sir,

I'm writing to say a big "thank you" for printing your article on Dr Wakefield and allowing a small ray of light and sanity into the media. It seems so blatantly obvious that great lengths are being taken to discredit Dr Wakefield and that no effort is being made to listen to him or to investigate (properly – not by those in the pay of the vaccine companies) the theories he has put forward. What is being reported as "the truth" is going to be accepted by many parents who are therefore not able to make well-informed choice re their children's health. Your article was simple facts, facts that I knew of due to my personal interest in the subject. Why has it taken so long for these to be published?

Thank you once again,
REBECCA HOSKINS,

(Mother of autistic child, aged six – and no, I do not believe that MMR caused her autism. My daughter's autism is linked to huge amounts of residual mercury from her DTP vaccination: another little gem that had been kept quiet for far too long)

Via email.

Sir,

In your latest Wakefield apologia, you state, Deer's intention is to "rub out" Wakefield, but fail to suggest his [Deer's] motivation.

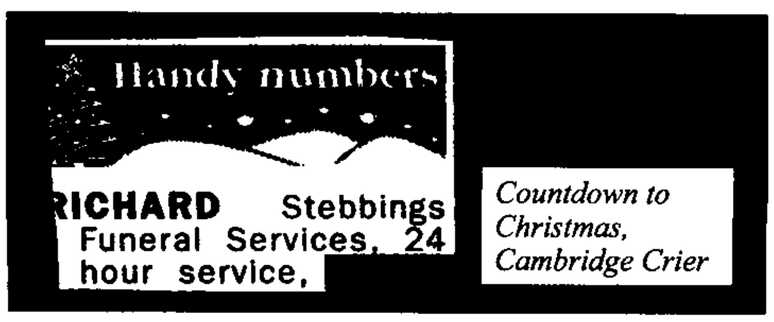
Furthermore, what is the Eye's motivation in promoting this dangerous, discredited delusionist?

In the same issue there are five attacks on the proposed anti-smoking legislation: M.D.'s spurious rant is particularly misguided.

Are you in the pocket (or should that be packet?) of the fag factories?

MALCOLM ROBINSON,

Barnsley, Yorks.



Sir,

As a parent following the MMR debate for the last four years I too was interested in Brian Deer's Dispatches programme broadcast on Channel 4 on Thursday 18 November.

Two things about Dr Wakefield emerged that I didn't know. One was that he had been retained by lawyers seeking compensation from victims of a measles vaccine and the other was his involvement with new drug patents. Both these revelations, indicating a motive for his research findings, went a long way to discredit the objectivity of his work. Unfortunately, Brian Deer's attempt to discredit Dr Wakefield ultimately raised more questions than it answered.

At the end of the programme parents were left feeling that the MMR debate was a manufactured commercial health scare, unworthy of all the fuss. If this was the case why has the department of health not used this argument instead of spending millions insisting the MMR jab was safe?

The Dispatches programme failed to provide answers regarding the supposed link between autism and MMR on which parental concern is based. The government clings to the flawed mantra "absence of evidence is evidence of absence", safe in the knowledge that if something can't be scientifically proven then there is no legal culpability. Parents are driven to protect their children and are sceptical of government reassurance and its motives.

Parents have seen government health assurances proved worthless, from BSE to Gulf War syndrome. Parents realise that the government drive to avoid large compensation claims overrides the desire to learn from mistakes.

The rise in autism is a very real health concern and the public don't see any serious research into its cause. They see only government denial for any part in its recent rise.

Until someone can identify why autism is on the increase then the public will look for their own likely causes. Currently the MMR jab is the prime suspect and the Dispatches programme offered nothing new on this subject. Attempting to destroy the credibility of a whistleblower is the first sign of a weak defence. Brian Deer has done a wonderful job for the government, but offered little to the parents of families blighted by autism and ignored by the government.

GARRY HONEY (a parent),

Via email.

SOLUTIONS

"Graduate Solutions" – *temping agency* **(Paul Tanter)**

"Search and Selection Solutions" – *temping agency* **(Alan Beevor)**

"Construction Industry Solutions" – *builders* **(Paul Tanter)**

"Interior Solutions" – *shop fitters* **(John Platts)**

"Waste Solutions" – *binmen* **(Harry Shave)**

"National, regional and pan-European supply chain solutions" – *lorry driving* **(Tony Dryland)**

"Hassle-free meal solutions" – *ready meals* **(Simon Mazier)**

"Safe and Efficient Vertical Access Solutions" – *lifts* **(David Asteraki)**

"Dedicated Surveillance Solutions" – *CCTV cameras* **(Andrew Wills)**

"Bra solutions" – *bras* **(Mike Karthauser)**

All submitted by readers

"Josh, wake up – we can't work the DVD player"

An Ofsted inspector writes...

Sir,

I write in response to your article in edition 1117 in which you question my right to be a school inspector. Your article refers to an inspection report in 2003 which states "since the last inspection in 1997 the school has experienced a period of weak leadership and poor management, etc". I had left the school in 2001 so was not a contributor to this inspection. In fact the school won a School Achievement Award awarded by the Department of Education in 2001 for "substantially improving results between 1997 and 2000". In the letter from the Minister of State for Education confirming the award she goes on to say "thank you for your leadership".

Your article also questions my ability to "manage the school in the best interests of staff or pupils". In fact a government-appointed body (Cambridge Education Associates) in a report in May 2001, only weeks before I left stated "The school is well placed to implement Performance Management through an ethos of respect, trust and openness". It goes on to say "Positive strong leadership along with an ethos to improve standards and pupil achievement were evident. In addition to this, policy documents were regularly updated and a culture of providing the best for the pupils in the school was evident. School won an 'Investors in People Award' in January 2001 primarily for its professional development programmes for all staff. The previous inspection report commented 'a strength of the school is its caring head teacher'."

In my final reference from Derby City they refer to my work at St Martins after 21 years as head teacher as "having a considerable amount of success with pupils with complex needs". My work as an inspector is described by Her Majesty's Inspectors in a written evaluation report to be "highly professional and very helpful to teachers". Inspectors should use well-documented facts like the above rather than assertions or gossip by misinformed and therefore misguided individuals as an evidence base for judgements.

Perhaps this is why I am now a successful inspector.

W.G. JEPSON,

Ofsted inspector.

Bravo Barfield

Sir,

Mike Barfield's retelling of Edward Lear's classic "The Owl and the Pussycat" (Eye 1120), in which the pussycat is the girl and the owl is the boy, is rather adroit.

Most children's books depict the owl as the female and tart up the pussycat in a waistcoat and smoking jacket. However, if you read carefully the text, the sex of neither animal is defined and it is not even clear whether the couple is heterosexual.

However, in a sequel "The Children of the Owl and the Pussycat", published posthumously in 1938, Lear's intention is revealed: "Our mother was the pussycat/Our father was the owl".

So top marks to Barfield for doing his research!

Yours pedantically,
OSCAR BRAVO,

Geneva, Switzerland.

Putting the jackboot in

Sir,

I was astonished by your "Anglo-German Royal Banquet Menu" (Eye 1119) with its references to "Eva Braun Windsor Soup", "Reich Pudding", "Bombe Harris", "Sspresso" and "Hande Hock". Given the sensitivity of Britain's relationship with Europe, and the ongoing need to build diplomatic and political bridges with Germany, I thought your piece was inopportune, tasteless and grossly insensitive.

I haven't laughed so much in years.

SIMON SHOLL,

Oxford.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"There's a whole lot of teams in the bottom six."

GRAEME LE SAUX, BBC
(Bernard Ineichen)

"Arsene Wenger has just hitched up his trousers. He's a very relieved man indeed."

Commentator, Sky
(R.W.J. Plenderleith)

"It's easy to keep losing at this game. It's a lot harder to keep winning."

WILLIE THORNE, BBC 2 Snooker
(Ross Wagman)

"Kleivert has back-heeled it through his own legs."

RODNEY MARSH, Sky Sports
(Richard Gray)

"One of the worst things you can do against a good side is beat them."

JOSH LEWSEY, Metro
(Richard Levinson)

"What I say is – why sit at home in England moaning about what a crap country it's become when you can be out here moaning about what a crap country it's become..."

Evolution: an evolving debate

Sir,

If you were to publish a review of a book on world travel, would you then publish a letter from a reader claiming that this was all wrong, because the Earth is flat?

I think not. Yet, because you are a collection of "arts"-trained snobs, you are prepared to give credence to one claiming that there is no substance in evolution, and claiming that Professor Dawkins' work is fantasy (Letters, 1120). Now, I realise this may just be a cunning ploy to get trained scientists and other truly educated people to foam and go off bang, but could you please check some facts before publishing letters?

Evolution is not a faith, it is one of the most comprehensively supported theories ever – about as well-grounded as that of gravity, in fact.

There are mountains of fossil evidence.

The complexities of cell and larger structures (such as eyes) are entirely possible, and even predictable, given the interplay between evolution, genetics and environmental pressures. These are exactly in keeping with the predictions of the theory.

Yours sincerely,
G.N.G. TINGEY,

Via email.

Sir,

George Gorniak says there is no "fossil evidence" for evolution. I think he must mean that there is no fossil proof of evolution, because the evidence has been enough to persuade virtually every scientist in the world not encumbered by extreme religious dogma. The reason that there is no fossil proof is that there could not be: scientific theories are falsifiable, not provable. We adopt the ones we have tried unsuccessfully to disprove.

JOE MORISON,

Via email.

Sir,

Discerning Eye readers wishing to investigate the books by Denton and Behe might be interested to note that Denton has since accepted most evolution (Nature's Destiny, 1998), and Behe never denied it, but for some bits of biochemistry. Those of a religious disposition might try Kenneth Miller's Finding Darwin's God more "balanced" than both these authors and Dawkins.

SIMON COLEMAN-SMITH,

Hampshire.

Sir,

If you want to offer your readers a balanced view of evolution that doesn't patronise, mislead or brow-beat them, may I recommend a book by an actual scientist, such as Daniel Dennet's Darwin's Dangerous Idea?

Yours sincerely,
CHRISTOPHER GRAY,

Via email.

● Thanks for the many similar letters. Ed.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **Islamabad**

from Our Own Correspondent

EXTENDING the role of President Pervez Musharraf as army chief came as a fait accompli to a country weaned on military rule – even though the general pledged in January to discard his uniform by the year-end.

Military juntas have ruled Pakistan directly for more than half our life since independence in 1947. Even when out of office the military is the power behind the throne.

Besides controlling our nuclear, defence and foreign policies, the Pakistani army is also our largest and most profitable business conglomerate. More than 1,200 serving and retired officers (mostly army) run a web of banks, transport, road building, communication and construction businesses worth billions of dollars.

The "Fauji", or soldiers' foundation, operates a private airline, hundreds of educational institutions, power plants, runs steel and cement factories and even produces sugar, electronic items and breakfast cereals. The khaki boys have also bought big tracts of expensive urban land at throwaway prices to build grandiose housing colonies across Pakistan.

The army's business interests fall broadly into three categories: those controlled by the chief of army staff; others in the formal military sector, including ordnance and state-owned armament factories managed by the ministry of defence; and the highly profitable charitable trusts that operate like private corporations.

The first group includes the National Highway Authority and Frontier Works Organisation, each headed by a two-star officer; the Special Communications Organisation – supported by the Signal Corps – and the National Logistics Cell that operates a countrywide trucking operation. Aided by the Army Engineering Corps, the army's road building conglomerate constructed the strategic Karakoram Highway in the 1980s connecting us to military and nuclear ally China, besides laying roads across the country. The Communications Organisation has worked with the Signals Corps to wire up the country. And the Logistics Cell is possibly the army's most profitable operation. Established in the 1970s its trucks would pick up armaments from the southern port of Karachi from CIA-chartered vessels that supported the "war" against the Soviets in Afghanistan. These convoys then ferried their cargo to the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan bordering Afghanistan to Mujahideen groups fighting the Soviet army.

After 1996 this massive fleet of trucks, controlled mostly by Pashtun tribesmen, was used by the ISID (our Inter Services Intelligence Directorate) to supply weapons and fuel to the Taliban. Intelligence sources believe these trailers also transported heroin from laboratories in the tribal areas along the Pakistan-Afghan border to Karachi from where it made its way to the west.

But the Fauji is the jewel in the military crown: an industrial conglomerate with an annual turnover of $500m and profits of more than $41m. Headed by a three-star officer, it provides "womb to tomb" facilities for nearly nine million retired servicemen including resettlement and re-employment schemes in military-run cement, power and sugar factories. It also grants retired soldiers land in villages along the line of control (LoC) across Pakistan's eastern frontier with India, providing a reservoir of manpower in the event of hostilities.

The Army Welfare Trust, meanwhile, employs around 6,000 former soldiers and runs the Askari Commercial Bank, one of our most profitable. Like his predecessors General Musharraf heads the bank's governing board. The trust is also involved in around 25 other projects worth around Rs17bn ($354m). Former Pakistan Air Force officers run the 26-year-old Shaheen Foundation with an annual turnover of Rs600m. The foundation manages Shaheen Airways, our highly profitable – and only private – airline. Pakistan navy officers, meanwhile, have been at the helm of the Bahria Foundation that manages around 20, mostly civilian, projects – also at great profit. As we say, democracy is what you make of it.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "This just goes to show what the seemingly innocent hobby of trainspotting can lead to if it isn't kept under control," a police spokesman told reporters in Osaka. "When we arrested Kenji Hishida, he confessed that his kleptomania had begun to develop about fifteen years ago, out of his long-standing interest in spotting trains. At first, he'd just stolen one railwayman's hat and jacket so he could get closer to the locomotives he admired, but then things started to get out of hand. And when we searched his house in Izumisano earlier today, we discovered that he'd stolen more than 10,000 pairs of railway workers' trousers, and had entire rooms full of hats, jackets, whistles, flags, and other railway

uniform items, as well as many thousands of rolls of railway lavatory paper.

"In his statement to us, Hishida admitted that he began stealing uniforms when he realised that merely looking at trains through binoculars was no longer satisfying him. To get closer, he knew he needed a disguise, and because the changing rooms of railway workers are not very secure, he was soon able to acquire a uniform for every occasion. Before long, he was bluffing his way into engine sheds and onto locomotives, but then he started to find the uniforms more fascinating than the trains. In particular, he became obsessed with railway workers' trousers, and grew more and more daring in his thefts. That's how he was finally caught, while trying to steal two pairs of trousers from a West Japan Railway facility in Akashi to add to his collection.

"This obsessive theft by collectors is a new and worrying development in Japanese society. In Nagano recently, a street lamp collector was arrested while using an oxy-acetylene cutter to remove one from a street, and last year in Aicho prefecture, a thief stole the right shoes of twenty-six girls, and a hair ribbon, while they were playing volleyball. It's all most peculiar." *(Mainichi Shimbun, 26/9/04. Spotter: Roger Edwards)*

– ● –

● *Decisions of the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal. Hearing: 24 February 2004. Respondent: Tokunbo Okunola.*

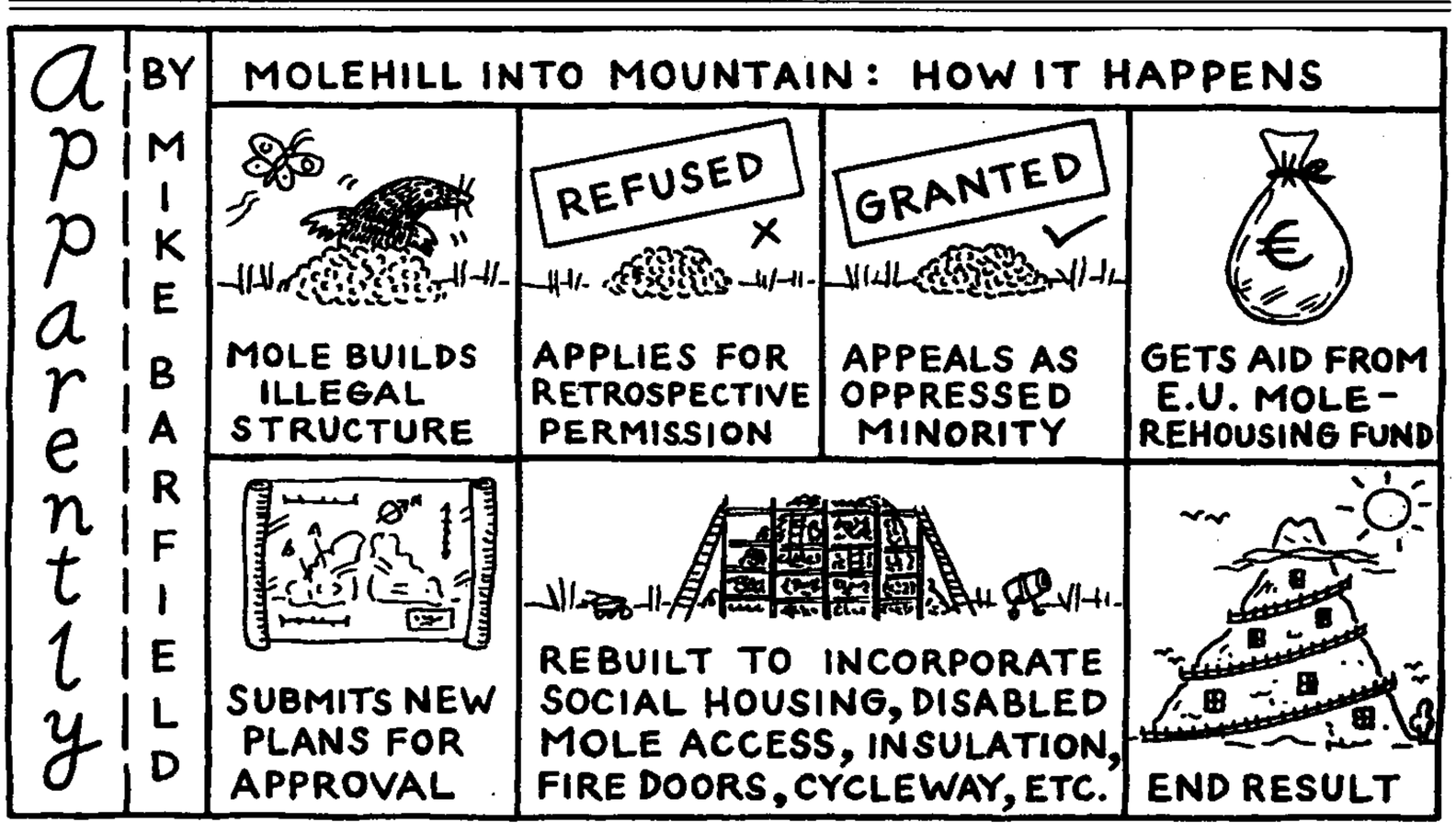
The SDT ordered that the respondent, of HM Prison Belmarsh, Western Way, London SE28 0EB, be struck off the roll for unbefitting conduct in that he had been convicted on 17 July 2003 of attempted murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. The SDT found that a conviction of attempted murder on the part of a solicitor amounted to serious misconduct. It also seriously and adversely affected the good reputation of the solicitors' profession. As the respondent had been admitted to the roll after his previous conviction of murder, the SDT had not taken that conviction into account. The respondent was ordered to pay £822 costs. (Law Society Gazette, 30/9/ 2004. Spotter: Ros Dunnily)

– ● –

● "Our action may seem harsh but I assure you it is perfectly legal," Krzysztof Lancucki of Poland's PKP state railway told a press conference in Warsaw. "We are acting in accordance with article 415 of the Civil Code, which allows us to seek damages from any person who causes delays in rail traffic. And just because Mr Banaszek was unconscious when his body was placed on the line and run over by a train does not alter the fact that he caused 2,058 zlotys worth of delays, for which he must pay."

Earlier, friends and neighbours of nineteen-year-old Pawel Banaszek had protested against the railway company's unsympathetic attitude. "After an accidental beer-spilling incident, Pawel was beaten senseless in a fight outside a bar," explained a colleague. "He was left for dead on the rails by the thugs who'd attacked him, then run over by a goods train, and he was lucky to survive. But even though he was paralysed by the incident, the PKP have insisted that he has to pay them 80 zlotys each month from his 600 zloty disability pension until the debt is paid, which will take him years. Worse still, his house burned down last week, but they're still demanding their money."

Later, Lancucki told reporters that the PKP would consider writing off half of the debt, if Banaszek made a formal request, and paid the other half on time. *(The Indian Express, 28/9/04. Spotter: Ronan Kelly)*


apparently
BY MIKE BARFIELD
MOLEHILL INTO MOUNTAIN: HOW IT HAPPENS
MOLE BUILDS ILLEGAL STRUCTURE
REFUSED
APPLIES FOR RETROSPECTIVE PERMISSION
GRANTED
APPEALS AS OPPRESSED MINORITY
GETS AID FROM E.U. MOLE-REHOUSING FUND
SUBMITS NEW PLANS FOR APPROVAL
REBUILT TO INCORPORATE SOCIAL HOUSING, DISABLED MOLE ACCESS, INSULATION, FIRE DOORS, CYCLEWAY, ETC.
END RESULT

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And can I say right away that this week has clearly been very difficult for all of us, not least for our good friend Mr Blunkett himself.

But through all these unhappy events, which have been such a talking point around the parish, there has been one shining thread of light, to remind us that, however black things sometimes look in life, we can always find a silver lining.

And in the case of Mr Blunkett's misfortunes, what better opportunity could they give us to spell out just what should be the core of our beliefs in the 21st century?

I know some of our older parishioners still want to hark back to the days when members of the PCC were expected to "set an example" by the way they lived their private lives!

In those days, if someone "strayed from the path", as they used to put it, there was a great deal of sanctimonious tut-tutting from certain members of the congregation, and on occasion the "offender" was even asked to give up his position!

Well, thank goodness, those days are long since dead and buried!

In the modern church, we now realise that what someone does in their private life is entirely their own concern.

After all, isn't that exactly what the word 'private' means? Do I have to spell it out – P-R-I-V-A-T-E!

And if you see a door with 'private' written on it, you don't just go barging in, do you?

No, you respect that person's right to do whatever they like behind that closed door, because it is nobody's business but their own!

Well, that's what we're talking about here, in a nutshell!

We've moved on from the days when a lot of sour-faced people used to go around giving lectures on "right" and "wrong".

And what a miserable lot they were in those days!

Today we've realised that what matters – the only thing that matters – is whether someone does their job well!

And, in the case of Mr Blunkett, can anyone argue that he hasn't been the best head of our Neighbourhood Watch we've ever had?

Thanks to his hard work and ceaseless vigilance, we can all now sleep more soundly in our beds with whoever we like!

So here is something we can all really be thankful for! That we've at last been liberated from all those judgemental beliefs of yesteryear!

Goodness me, just imagine what would have happened if all this had

taken place in days gone by!

We would have seen poor David being taken out and stoned to death!

As for his friend Mrs Quinn, she would probably have been burned at the stake as a witch!

Can anyone honestly put their hand on their heart and say that we want to go back to those days?

I thought not! So let's draw a line under this unhappy business, shall we, and wish David godspeed in his efforts to find lasting happiness by breaking up Mrs Quinn's marriage and getting custody over his illegitimate children!

Yours, Tony

Parish Postbag

From our Treasurer, Mr Brown

Dear Sir,

With regard to my recent presentation of the parish's annual accounts, which are a stunning testimony to my own prudence, ability and hard work, may I make it clear that my task in trying to balance the books would have been made very much easier had it not been for the Vicar's foolhardy and ill-advised support for the Rev Dubya and his supposed crusade against the Evil One. As a result of the vicar's reckless gullibility in this regard, the parish is now in debt to the tune of

Yours sincerely

The Editor reserves the right to shorten all letters from our treasurer when he is in one of his sulks, which incidentally are becoming all too frequent these days! D.H.

Christmas Quiz!

Our picture shows a kindly, almost saintly figure, who, at this time of year, gives away generous presents to kiddies, mums, dads, grannies and grandpas out of the kindness of his heart. But who is the old guy in red with the beard? Answers to G. Brown, The Vicarage, St Albion. (Is this right?)

Christmas Charity Appeal

The vicar has given a pledge that next year he will stamp out the scourge of Aids in Africa for once and for all.

Obviously Tony doesn't need your help because he can do this all on his own. But if you want to show your support for his campaign to free the world of this terrible plague, just fill in the form below and send it to the vicarage.

I . . . . . (fill in name) wish to register my support for all the wonderful work the vicar is doing to rid the world of Aids.

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM MR BIRT

As you know, I have spent the last two years drawing up plans on how to re-engineer the parish infrastructure to make more efficient use of its manpower resources. In simple terms, this means that many of you will not have a job anymore, leaving a rationalised and slimmed-down Parish bureaucracy of one, ie myself.

A Merry Christmas to you all!

Mr Birt

PS. In the picture you will see a sack, which should give you a clue as to what the New Year will bring.

Parish Scenes

(that the vicar does not want to see!)

No. 94: The Boxing Day Service

Thanks to local artist Mr de la Nougerede for this nightmare vision! D.H.

My eBay

jamesgordonbrown, mp (11)

Items I'm Bidding On (1-2 of 2 items)

	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **'Trusting Too Much' self-help guide, pb**	£2.99	£1.50	1
☐ **'The Million Pound Note' DVD – still sealed**	£4.99	£1.50	1

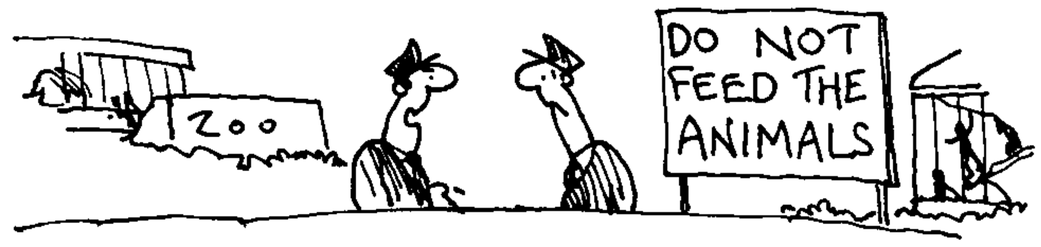
Items I'm Selling (1-6 of 6 items)

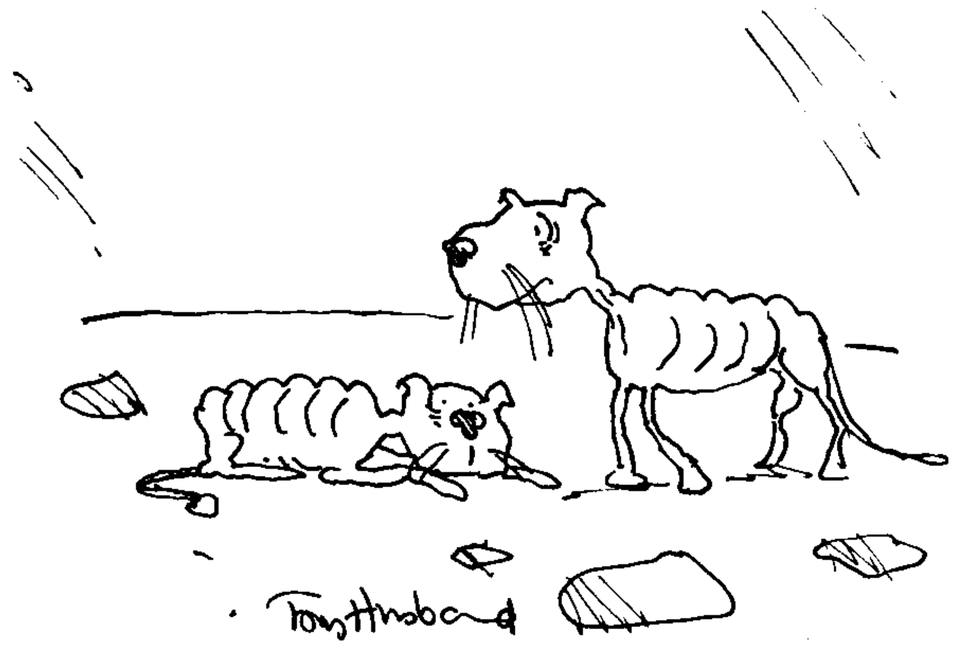
	Current Price	Postage Cost	Bids
☐ **genuine 1955 packet of Polos, mint, mint, in wrapper**	£10.00	buyer to collect	0
☐ **tea-bags, used, 1 gross**	£0.99	buyer to collect	0
☐ **'Granita' restaurant cookbook – unwanted gift**	£20.00	buyer to collect	0
☐ **artificial sweetener, large size**	£4.99	buyer to collect	0
☐ **Christmas cracker, used, no novelty, hat never worn**	£0.99	buyer to collect	0
☐ **'Love They Neighbour' DVD, watched once**	£4.99	buyer to collect	0

Mr Applebaum deflected charges that he had tried to absolve Mr Clinton by blaming the controversy and a power-mad Republican Congress. "What we tried to show was that this episode was embedded in a very rich and very complicated, and very full-blown activity of the presidency," he said.

Grauniad

"No, you're their keeper – the sign's not meant for you"





EU CHIEF DEFENDS NEW TEAM

by Our Brussels Correspondent **Jacques Tatty**

EUROPEAN president Jose Manuel Barroso has defended his decision to appoint a convicted criminal as the EU's new transport commissioner.

"Jacques Barrot's experience will be invaluable to the commission," insisted Mr Barroso. "And I'm stuck with him *[Surely "sticking with him"? Ed.]* 100 percent."

Egg and Cresson face

Mr Barrot, found guilty of embezzling party funds in his native France, failed to tell the commission about his conviction.

"But the important thing is he got away with it – as he did with the original crime, thanks to a pardon from President Chirac," said Mr Barroso.

Mr Barrot isn't the only appointment to cause a furore. Earlier, Italy's Rocco Buttiglione had to stand down as justice commissioner when it emerged he had a string of convictions as a Roman Catholic.

"If he'd had convictions for fraud or lying on his mortgage application form, it might have been different," said one Labour *MEP.* "But he believes *(cont. p. 94)*

MERRY CHRISTMAS
WANT SOME?!
GOD BLESS US, EVERY ONE!
!!
HE ASKED SANTA FOR CIGARETTES!
POLICE
A TIME FOR GIVING...
WE HIRED CHERIE BLAIR TO GIVE US AN AFTER CHRISTMAS DINNER SPEECH
CAN I SEE YOUR I.D.
THAT'S A COOL HOODY DUDE!
BIG STORE
HAVE YOU REMEMBERED TO PUT YOUR BULLET PROOF VEST ON?
TOYS

Coming Soon

THE INELECTABLES

Treat yourself this Christmas to the hysterically funny family comedy about a group of one-time superheroes now living anonymously in Conservative Central Office. No one wants them any more and they have lost all their powers. Can they return and save the world? No.

★★★★★★ STARRING ★★★★★★

Mr Inelectable **VOICE OF MICHAEL HOWARD**

Elastigirl **THERESA MAY**

Twitman **OLIVER LETWIN**

Violent **JOHN REDWOOD**

and introducing

BORIS JOHNSON as Bonk

KNACKER BACKS 'SHOOT TO KILL' CAMPAIGN

by Our Crime Staff **Dominic Longarmofthelawson**

CHIEF INSPECTOR 'Knacker of the Yard' Knacker today gave his support to householders who take the law into their own hands and kill intruders.

Said Knacker: "For too long people have expected the police to come round and help them during burglaries. This is a waste of police time, when our officers could be better occupied doing their paperwork or picking up their takeaway curries ("chicken madras, poppadoms, no lager thanks I'm on duty, oh, all right, just the one").

Knacker, who retires this year, said that he was keen for the public to share the burden of law enforcement with uniformed officers.

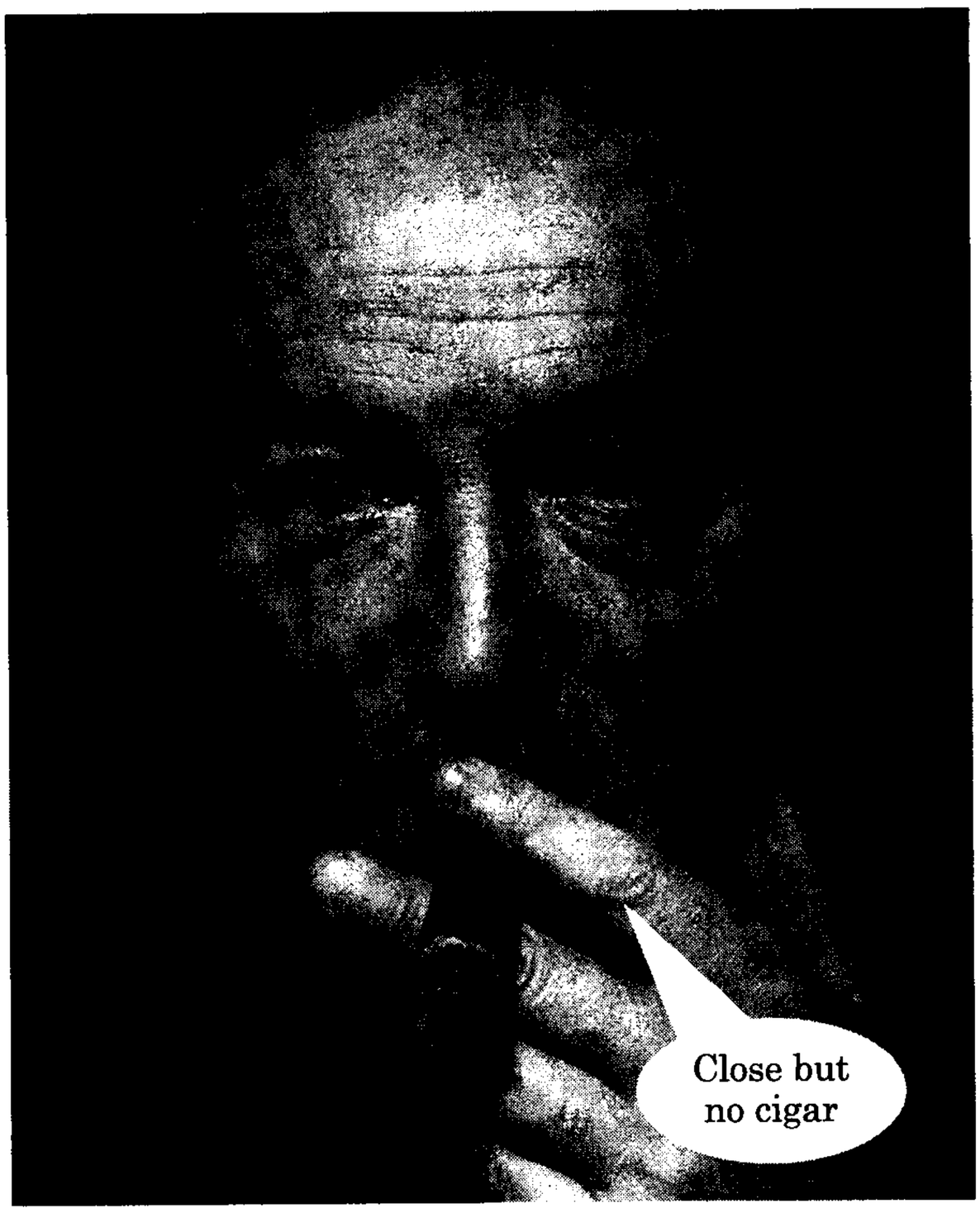
"The way to cut crime in this country is for ordinary citizens to carry guns at all times and to exercise their right to shoot anybody who might be about to commit a crime."

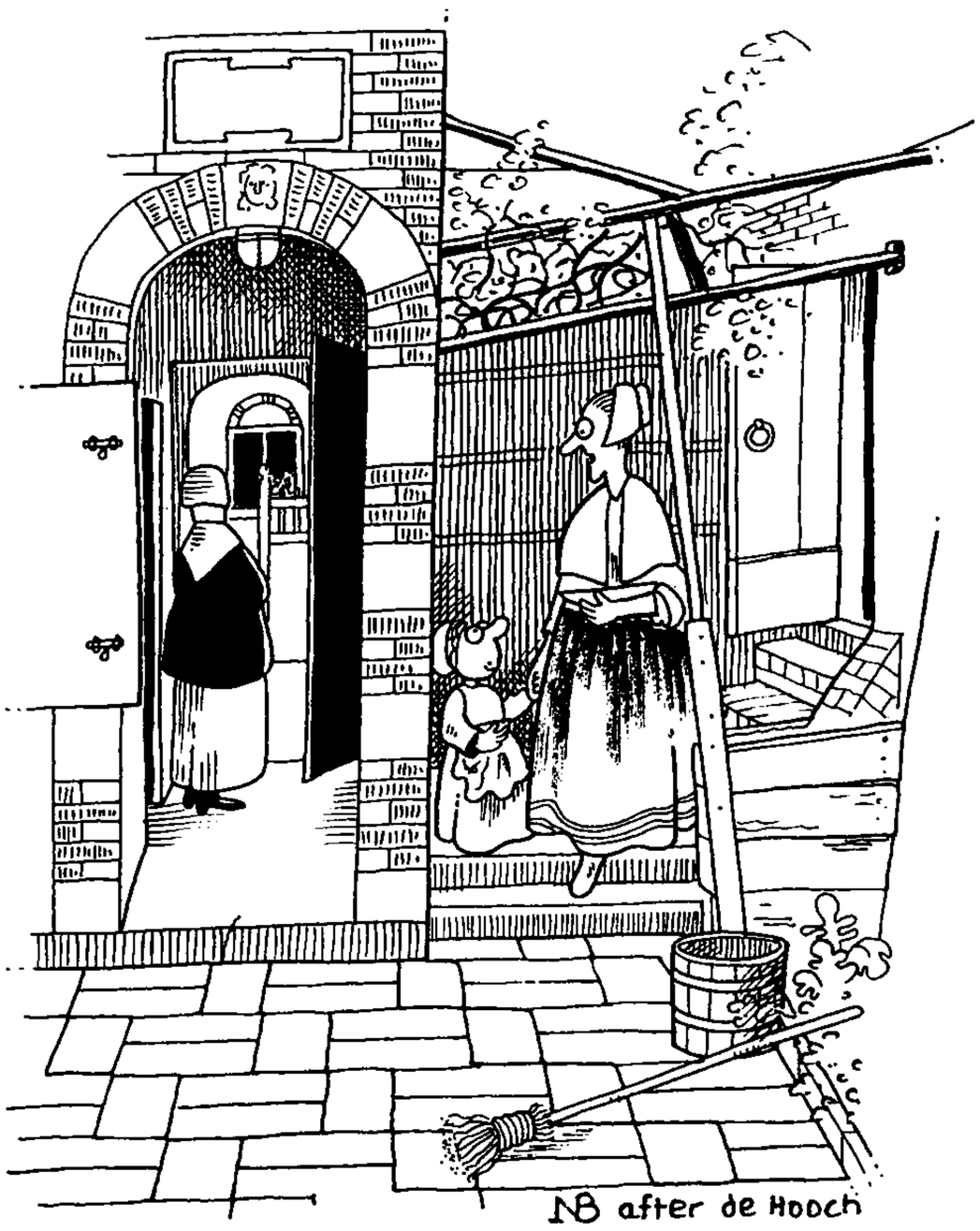
Sir John Knacker is 94.

ON OTHER PAGES

INSPECTOR Knacker is to investigate claims that M. Henri Paul, the late Princess Diana's chauffeur, was in fact employed by aliens who were attempting to abduct her and take her to Venus to start a new colony of superbeings. He would like to talk confidentially to any aliens who might have any relevant information. He can be contacted at the Fugger Suite at the Ritz in Paris during office hours.

TELEGRAPH LOSES LIBEL ACTION





"We're moving to Amsterdam to get you into the school of Rembrandt catchment area"

GNOME'S XMAS

THE
DAVID BLUNKETT Horror Mask!

Terrify friends and family this Christmas when you go round and tell the children that you are their father! Watch the kiddies burst into tears!

99p ☆ **Hours of fun**
(Inflatable Guide Dog Extra)

New from the 'Holy Land'!!
The Lucky Stone Of Amiel

FOR THOUSANDS of years the desert peoples of Barbaria have known the secret of this amazing talisman, which can keep its owner out of prison even though her husband is sent down for 20 years.

Don't be disappointed – send your money now!

Colours: Black.
Price: £2,000,000.

The Holy Toaster

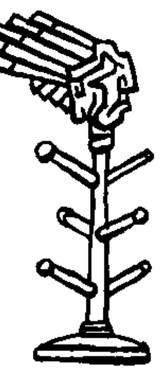
ARE you sick of reading that other people have discovered the face of Our Lady on their piece of toast? Now you too can share in the miracle.

Just pop in your bread and Hey Presto! out comes your toast, complete with imprint of your favourite saint!

Says St Bob of Geldof "Fock off!"

✱Islamic version patent applied for!

Past Times
THE AZTEC MUG TREE



VOYAGE back in time to drink your morning beverage in the spirit of God King Montezuma! With this 100% genuine Solid-Gold-Style Mug Tree facsimile you span the centuries as you hang up your favourite mug in the tradition of this cruel and ancient people.

Price £24.75*

***MUGS EXTRA**

Hammock lovers!!!

Get into the swing of it with 'ELECTRO-HAM'

Enjoy the swaying motion of your hammock without having to move a muscle! Hand-held remote control gives these three speeds:

- ***gentle breeze***
- ***choppy seas***
- ***force-10 hurricane***

Plays theme tune from The Blue Planet

Price: £469.99

The Pocket CHAINSAW

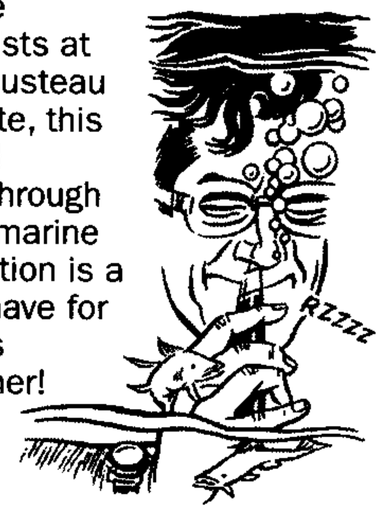
No more plastic-packet-opening-purgatory with this incredible miniature chainsaw from Gdansk. Only 2 inches long, this petrol-driven power tool can rip through a troublesome sandwich pack in seconds!

Plays theme tune from BBC TV's "Strictly Come Dancing"

Price: £375.00

THE
AQUA-NOSE XZ204

THE world's first underwater nasal hair remover! Invented by marine scientists at the Cousteau Institute, this radical breakthrough in submarine exfoliation is a must-have for today's swimmer!

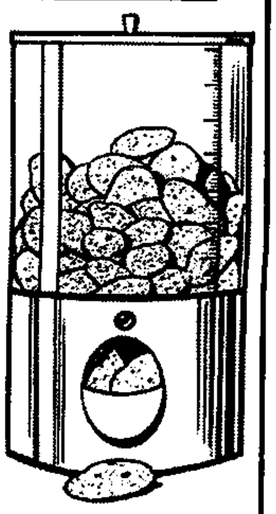


£199.95 ***(Batteries not included)***

Plays theme tune from ITV's "X-Factor"

THE
POTATO DISPENSER

As used by top Ukrainian chefs, this invaluable kitchen aid tells you – at a glance – when you are running low on potatoes.



Says TV's Gordon Ramsay, "F off!"***

Colours: Clear, see-through, transparent

PET LOVERS
FIDO-POPS™

WHY should man's best friend sit in the corner stone cold sober whilst everyone else is getting merry? Now Fido too can have a skinful and join in the festive fun! *Just pour into his bowl and watch him woof it down!!*

FLAVOURS: Pooch Hooch, Bark-adi Breezer, Banana Dachsund.

Price: £11.75 per six-pack

GENTLEMEN!!!

Now you can revive your flagging love-life with

'SPECTAGRA'

Nature's own sex-remedy comes direct from the Doughty Street laboratories (known as "the sex centre of the universe").

Immediate results guaranteed for would-be lovers of both sexes. You won't believe the change in your libido after only one tablet of Spectagra.

Says R. Liddle, "A liddle goes a long way!"

Says Boris J, "Cripes!"

Says Mrs Kimberly Q, "No comment. I'm under a great deal of stress."

Price (packet of three): £120 per annum

MAILMART

Introducing

CIGA-DESK™

THE WORLD'S FIRST portable workstation for smokers.

Why waste valuable working time when you have to nip out of the office into the street for a cigarette?

Now when all the other smokers are standing around gossiping, *you* can have a fag and *still* get on with your job!!

£374.99 ***Plays theme tune from TV's "Sex Inspectors".***

Stationery Lovers!

Personalised

POST-IT NOTES

BE THE envy of your friends and work colleagues with your own name on your very own post-it notes! Watch your office cred soar as you remind yourself to pay your car tax or pick some beans on your way home.

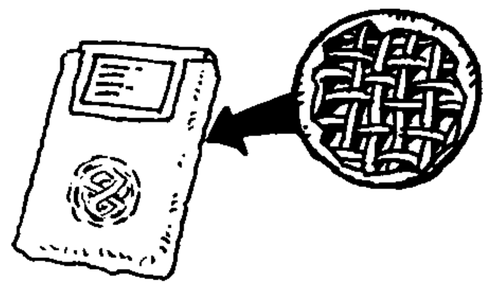
Names: Wayne, Shane, Darren, Jason, Peregrine Worsthorne.

*Says office star Ricky Gervais, "F*** off!"*

Price: £5 for box of 500

Past Times

SAXON I-POD CASE



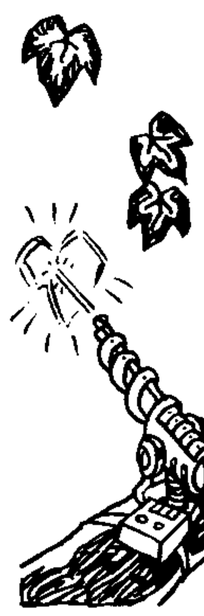
This authentic reproduction wattle 'n' daub MP3 player case takes you back to the by-gone world of Arthurian Britain – the land of Merlin, Guinevere and King Alfred and his cakes of the Round Table.

Price: £335.58

Colours: Black Knight ● Will Scarlet ● Woman in White

An End To Autumn Leaf Blues With

LASER LEAF™



When attached to the trunk of your favourite tree, this Pentagon-approved infra-red laser cannon obliterates each individual leaf – as it falls.

No mess, no mulch, no more boring sweeping up!

£9,999.99

Plays theme tune to Alan Titmarsh's *Natural History of the British Isles*

Warning: Laser Leaf is lethal when it comes into contact with small animals, children or adults.

PHONE LOVERS!!!

New from the Czech Republic!

The 'Swiss Army' Mobile

NOT only a mobile phone, but comes with 100-plus additional features including: ● *800cm tape-measure* ● *x60 telescope* ● *bathroom scales* ● *shooting stick* ● *equine hoof stone remover and many more!*

Plays theme tune from Foyle's War.

Price: £1,899.99 (plus VAT)

Hat Lovers!

Say Goodbye To Wind Gust Misery With

HAT SAFE™

Thanks to this breakthrough in headware retention technology from Lille, your hat will never blow away again! Simply insert this revolutionary device into your hat. (Fits all sizes. Weighs 15kg)

£10.99

(Hat not supplied)

Turn Your Chimney Into A Valuable Extra Room With

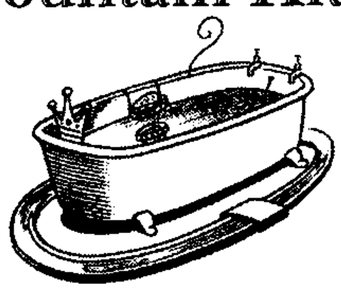
The Gnome Chimney Conversion

You too can soon be the proud owner of an office, wine cellar, shower unit, playroom or indoor swimming pool!

Phone 08987-3728421 now for free advice (calls charged at £10.00 per second).

Turn Your Bath Into A Moving Tribute To The Late Princess Of Wales With The

Home Diana Memorial Fountain Kit™



FITS easily into any bath, so that when you're not bathing, you're still remembering the People's Princess! PRICE: 10p (bath water not included)

Warning: Kit may be unsuitable for children

Says Harrods' Mohamed Fayed. "Fug off!"

Senior Citizens! At last – the stairlift that thinks it's a Teas-made!

THE CHA-LIFT™

How often have you been gasping for a cuppa half-way up? Now you can quench that thirst in seconds! Just switch on, sit down and brew up!

Price: £75,324.73

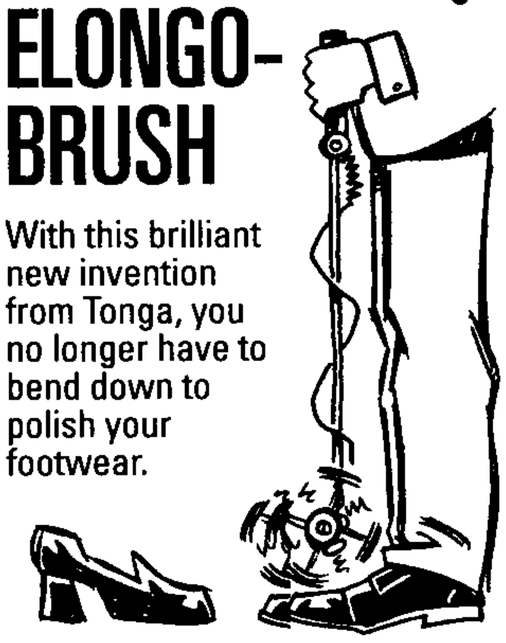
(tea bags not supplied)

♪ Plays Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven"

Shoe Polishers – Say Goodbye to Aching Back Misery with

ELONGO-BRUSH

With this brilliant new invention from Tonga, you no longer have to bend down to polish your footwear.



Just switch on and – hey presto! – your shoes are nice 'n' shiny!

Price: £2.99

(batteries not included).

That Budd Report In Full

To The Prime Minister
From Sir Zola Budd QCMG, QT, QED

An Investigation Into Allegations Surrounding The Conduct Of The Home Secretary, the Rt. Hon. David Blunkett R.C., M.P.

1.1 As an old friend of the Home Secretary, I was asked by the Prime Minister to carry out a full inquiry into the issuing of permanent UK resident's status to Miss Philippina Philippino of the Philippines.

1.2 After giving this matter very careful consideration, I have concluded that Mr Blunkett's conduct in this matter is not within the remit of my inquiry.

1.3 This is because such an investigation might indicate that Mr Blunkett may in some way have behaved in an inappropriate manner, which he clearly hasn't, as I have already been informed at the very highest level (by the Prime Minister).

1.4 In the light of the above, I am fully satisfied that the Home Secretary has at all times behaved with the utmost propriety, in keeping with his high office. And if he hasn't, it is none of my business.

Signed
Lord Budd of Whitewash,
Master of Hutton College,
The University of Butler.

New 'Fast-Track' Revelations Rock Government

by **Peter Oborne**

THE BUDD report, which clears David Blunkett of any wrongdoing whatever, was apparently 'fast-tracked' on the personal insistence of the prime minister.

Normally, reports clearing ministers of impropriety take several months to be processed.

But, on this occasion, we have learned the Budd report took only 10 seconds to compile – a world record.

Said a leading member of the Opposition, Mr Michael Howard, "It seems a bit odd that this report has come out so quickly, but David is a decent chap and he deserves to be exonerated".

Hunting With Dogs To Be Banned

with **'Old Shagger'**

THE AGE-OLD sport of hunting women with a dog is to be outlawed under new legislation rushed through by the prime minister yesterday.

A leading campaigner, Mr Stephen Quinn, said, "In this day and age it is outrageous that Home Secretaries should be allowed to roam the country with their dog, trying to sniff out women whom they can then jump on and maul."

Blunking With Dogs

"If you have ever been in at 'the kill', it is a disgusting spectacle," Mr Quinn concluded, "and would put you off this so-called sport for life."

However, a leading enthusiast for the sport, a Mr D.N.A. Blunkett (no relation unless proved to the contrary), was strongly opposed to the ban.

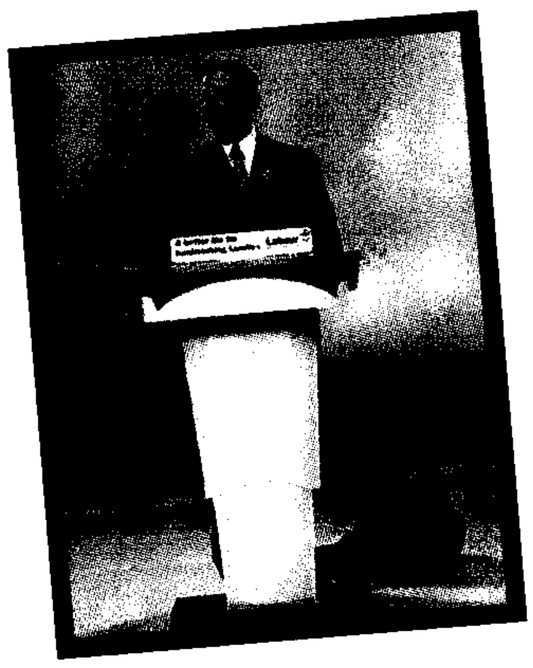
Foxy Lady

"There is no finer sight than a Home Secretary and his dog in full cry, as they pursue their quarry into the nearest wood.

"If all this must now come to an end, it would be a very sad day. I may even have to face the prospect of losing my job."

Novelty Christmas Album!!

Singalong This Yuletide With DAVE BLUNKETT and His Singing Dog Sadie!!



Hits include

- *Once in Royal David's Bedroom*
- *Having It Away In A Manger*
- *I Saw Mummy Kissing The Home Secretary*
- *O Come All Ye Unfaithful*
- *Unto Me Two Sons are Born*

and many more...

Send £12.99 now to DNA Records at the Immigration and Asylum Department, Lunar House, Croydon, who will fast-track your order in 'record' time!!

"So Donald turned the spare bedroom into a lap-dancing club"

That All-Purpose Blunkett Leader

IN TRYING to assess the political consequences of recent revelations about the private life of Mr David Blunkett, it is vital to focus on the real issue at the heart of this tangled story.

It is not important that the Home Secretary may have fathered two illegitimate children with a married woman and now seeks his right to paternal access on alternate weekends. It should not be a matter of public concern that Mr Blunkett allegedly deceived the wronged husband of his mistress, and took the man's child, behind his back, on an illicit holiday to the Greek island of Intakos. Equally irrelevant is the fact that Mr Blunkett may now be attempting to break up a family unit, as part of a private vendetta against his former mistress, when she has made it abundantly clear that she wishes to have nothing further to do with him.

All these matters are entirely Mr Blunkett's private affair, and should not be taken in to account in assessing his fitness to exercise high public office.

No, the matter which should concern us all is whether Mr Blunkett should have arranged a railway ticket worth £2.20 for Mrs Quinn to travel on the Central Line from Ealing Broadway to Notting Hill, despite the fact that, at the time, they were not married, even though they were in a "deep and loving relationship".

It is all very well for Mr Blunkett now to plead that his gift of the ticket arose only from "a genuine mistake".

The fact is that, if proven, this dereliction of duty would constitute one of the gravest breaches of trust by a government minister ever recorded in the history of British politics. It would then be incumbent on Mr Blunkett to consider his position very carefully.

© *All newspapers.*

WOMAN CLAIMS NOT TO HAVE HAD AFFAIR WITH BLUNKETT

by Our Legover Staff **Phil Paper**

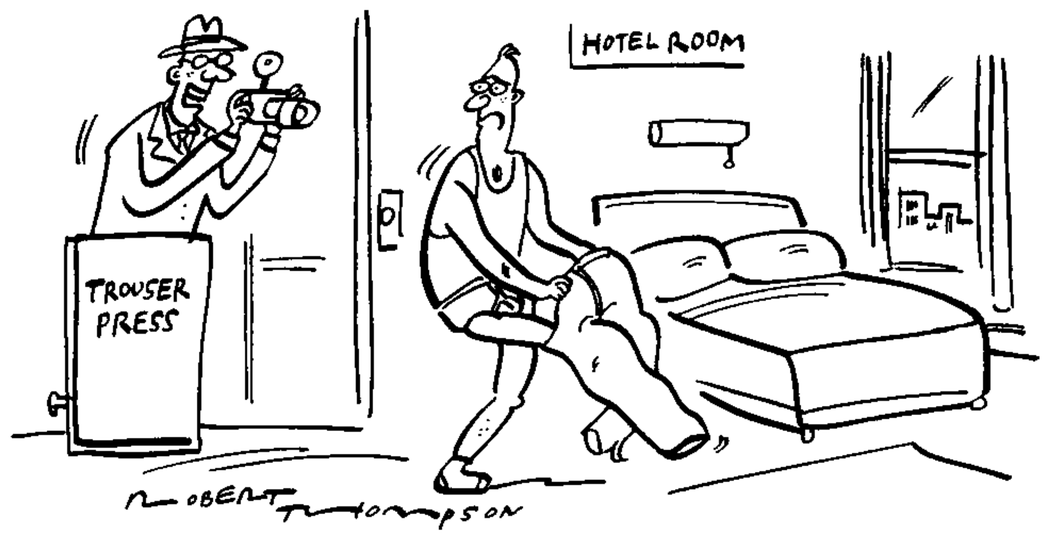
A WOMAN today sensationally claimed that she had never slept with David Blunkett, the Home Secretary. "The public has a right to know," she told reporters, "that Mr Blunkett never turned up at my boyfriend's flat, never took me off on holiday while my husband was away and is not the father of any of my children.

"I hope now," she continued, "that the press will respect my privacy and will let me get on with the rest of my life."

The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said that he was standing by Mr Blunkett even though "he had not behaved disgracefully in this instance".

However, last night many MPs were demanding that Mr Blunkett stay on, as news of this latest twist in the long, drawn-out saga emerged.

Last night, Mr Blunkett was unavailable for comment because he was in bed with some woman he had met in his office.



"This way, sir"

Great Moments In Comedy

To father one child by someone else's wife, Mr Blunkett, might be considered a misfortune. To father two looks like carelessness

"The Importance of Being Honest" Act 1

THE BOOK THEY ARE ALL TALKING ABOUT

BLUNKETTY-BLUNK

A Portrait of Power

THE Eye has exclusively obtained the serialisation rights of the most explosive political biography the world has ever seen. David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, speaks out as never before and lifts the lid on his Cabinet colleagues.

Gordon Brown: Gordon is a tough nut but not as tough as me.

John Prescott: John thinks he's tough, but he's not as tough as I am.

Jack Straw: He was a disaster as Home Secretary. Luckily, I was able to clear up the mess he left behind. Because I'm tough.

Margaret Beckett: When I walk into the room she says, "You're really tough, David". And I am.

Robin Cook: What kind of a bearded twit gets into trouble with another woman? That's not tough.

Tony Blair: He's tough. Like me.

© *Stephen Bollocks, Mailtrash 2004.*

BLUNKETT DEMANDS 'ACCESS TO EVERYONE'

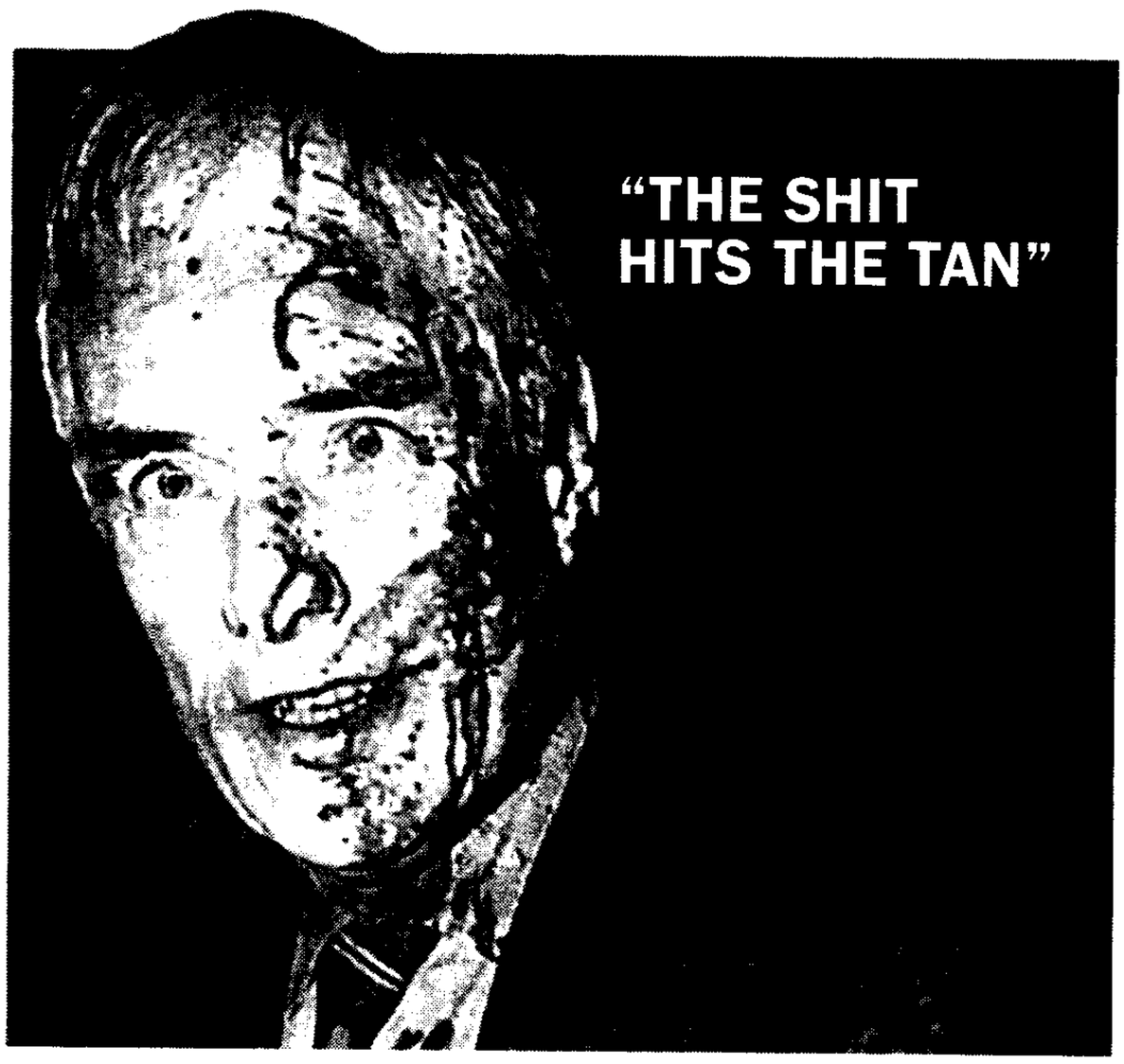
By Our Legal Staff **Joshua Frozenbeard**

DAVID BLUNKETT has been warned by the Prime Minister that he has to decide between his career and private life after he continued to press for 'full access' to every person living in Britain via I.D. Cards.

"I'm well within my rights to be demanding access into every aspect of the British public's life 24-hours-a-day," the Home Secretary told reporters. "I.D. cards are my baby and I'll fight in the courts to prove that every last one of you could be an Al Qaeda terrorist if I have to."

However, Civil Liberties groups have warned that this time it won't be just Kimberly Quinn being screwed by the Home Secretary.

NEW ENGLISH PROVERBS



A FISH WRITES

AS YET another royal prince, Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, passes away, we find ourselves increasingly worried that there will be no more princes left in the world. This is not scaremongering. It is the appalling truth that we fish must contemplate as we look around our world. As my old friend Laurens van der Porpoise once put it, "There's plenty more fish in the sea". How true that was at the time,when shoals of royalty swam happily in the seas all over the globe. But it is no longer true.

Now only a beleaguered handful of princes remain and increasingly they are washed up. Governments even tell people to devour princes for their own health. That really is appalling. We need to do everything we can to build up our stocks of royals – we think of the young Princes Hallibut and Gills and their need to breed in peace, away from the nets of the *(cont. p. 94)*

"Love your retro look"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam

So. Farewell
Then Mrs
Thatcher's sister
And Yasser
Arafat's brother.

What an
Extraordinary
Coincidence that
You should die
In the same week.

But then
Everyone is
Someone's brother
Or sister.

(Unless you are
An only child.
Like me.)

E.J. Thribb (no relations), 17½

THE Sun

THE BLUNKETT AFFAIR

The Sun says:

VERY LITTLE because we don't want to rock the boat and Mr Murdoch has told us to suck up to the Government.

On other pages: Even less.

the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOMBY
FOOTBALL ACADEMY
THAT REALLY IS A GREAT 'STEP OVER' WHERE DID YOU LEARN IT?
ON THE STREETS
OH, WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER WITH A TIN CAN?
NO...
"LAST FRIDAY NIGHT, OUTSIDE THE CLUB WITH MY TEAM MATES...
FUCKIN' 'ELL GET UP DAZ, WE'VE GOT A GAME IN 12hrs!
CLUB
HIC

Nursery Times
Friday, 10 December, 2004

Royal Mail

LAST POSTING DAYS FOR CHRISTMAS 2005

First Class Mail	July 28th 2004
Second Class Mail	March 14th 2004
Air Mail	You're having a laugh now

CINDERS TAPES ROCK FAIRYLAND

by Our Court Staff
No Barclay Brothers Grimm

Secret tapes, recorded by the late Cinderella, Princess of Hearts, have shocked the good folk of fairyland.

The late Princess is heard talking more frankly than ever before about her troubled relationship with Prince Charming.

Cinders reveals how she first caught sight of the Prince, when, thanks to her fairy godmother, she was an unexpected guest at the Royal Ball.

Mother Goosed

"He looked kind of lonely and sad, ya? So I went up to him and said 'Gosh, sir, you look rather lonely and sad. And he asked me if I would like to come upstairs and see his watercolours.

"But when we got to his bedroom, there weren't any watercolours and he jumped on me. It was really weird."

Queen of Tarts

Later in the tapes, Cinderella reveals that her sex life with Prince Charming was hardly magical.

"He was only interested once every three weeks. The rest of the time he was off with the Ugly Sister."

TEST MATCH SPECIAL

Live From Harare

Aggers: ... and so, as we join the afternoon session here in the sunshine, it's still England batting and what a fine shot that is, straight into the crowd by one of the security forces, and is that four?

Blowers: ... no, my dear old thing, that's definitely six bodies I can count... and, oh, look, a vulture has landed on the pitch... how delightful... and one of the groundsmen is trying to shoo it away... and, oh dear, he's been shot as well... so that's now seven gone, by my reckoning, and it's not even tea.

Aggers: Now, Vaughan seems to be distracted... there is some movement behind the bowler's arm.

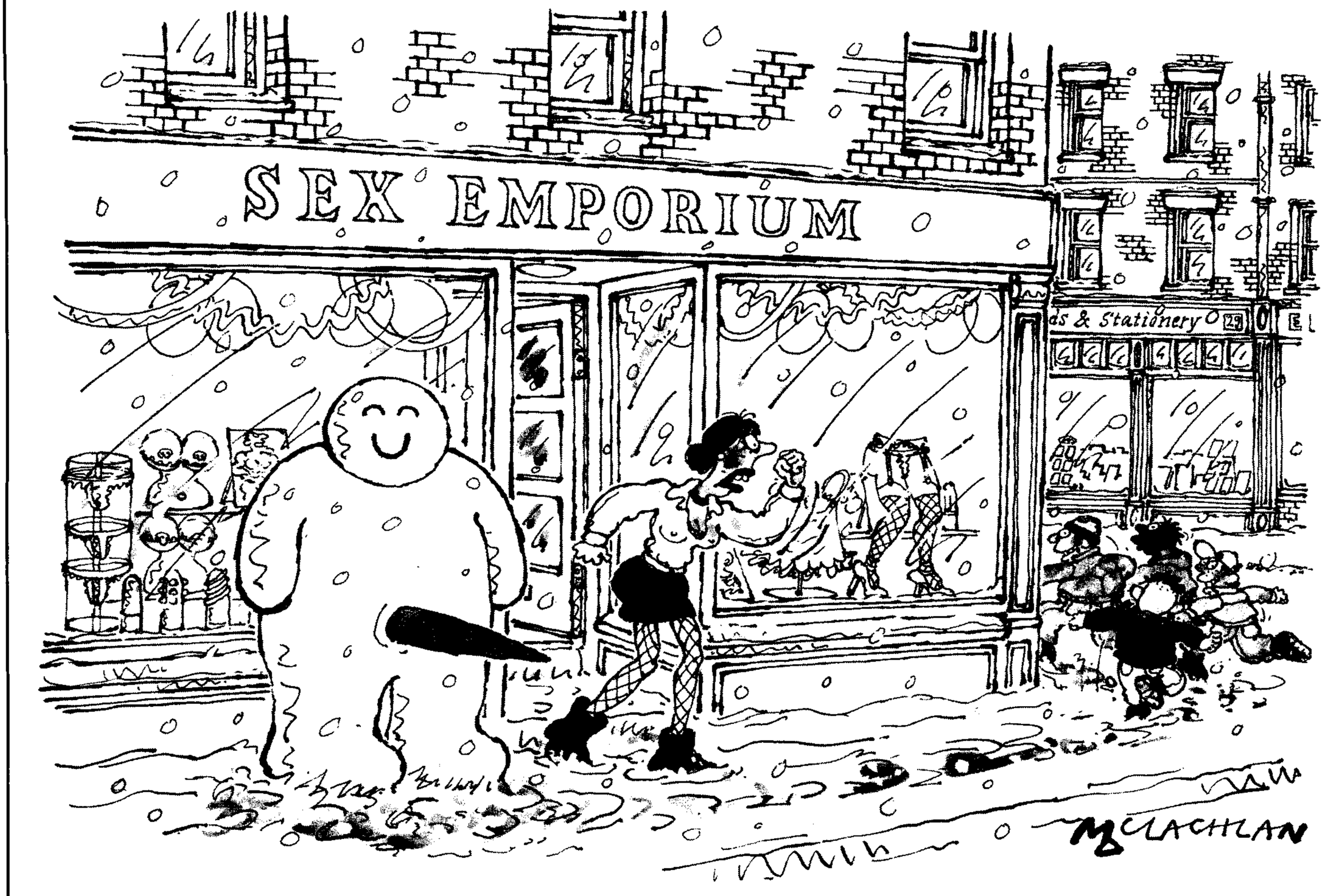
Blowers: Yes, it's some farmers being forcibly moved off their land... yes, it's quite clear now... and that's very close...

Aggers: Vaughan very nearly having to shake hands with Robert Mugabe... lucky to get away with that...

Blowers: ...and, oh my goodness, the batsmen are complaining about the light. Yes, the whole country is ablaze...

Aggers: ...and after Aggers and Blowers it'll be Murders

(continues 94 KillerHertz)



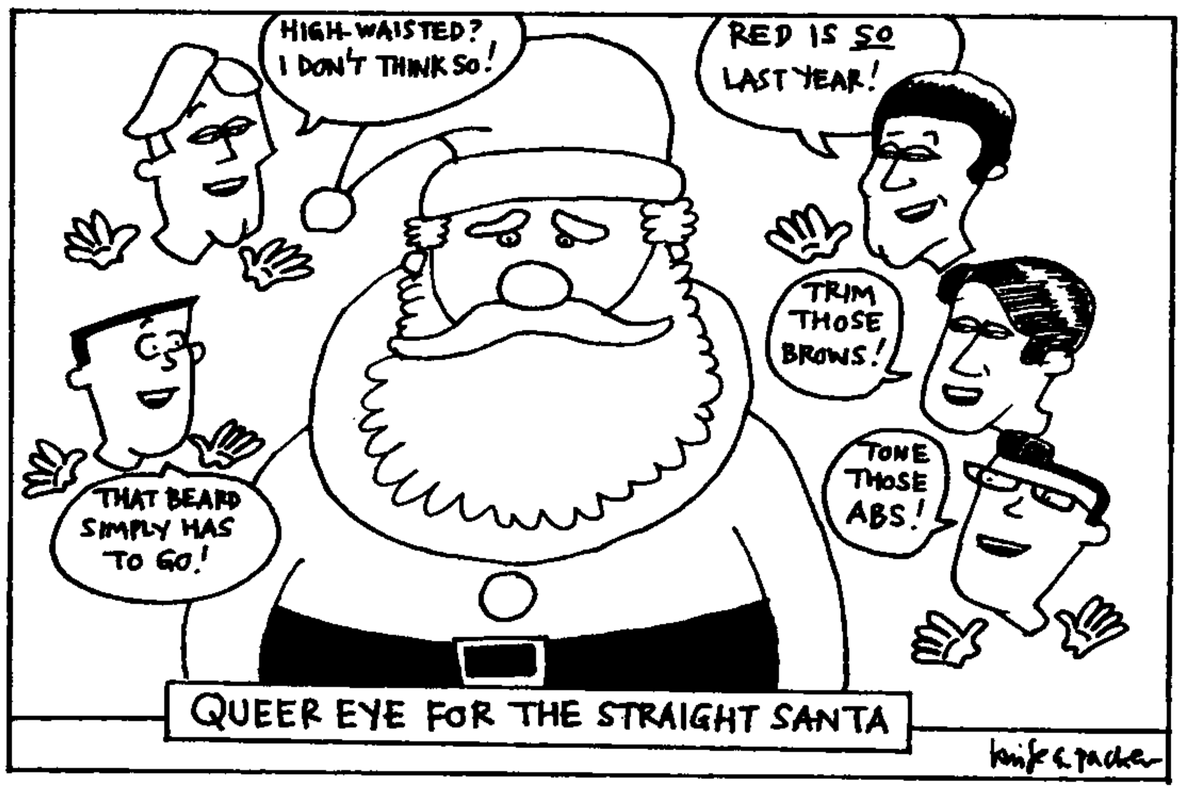
'BRING OUR BOYS HOME FOR CHRISTMAS' Parents' Plea

by Our Defence Staff **Lunchtime O'Buse**

WORRIED parents of British soldiers pleaded with the Ministry of Defence last night to take their sons "out of the danger zone" and return them to safety.

Said one anxious mother, "My boy is undergoing basic training in the so-called triangle of death, ie somewhere near Catterick, and he is in daily danger of rape, torture and possibly death.

"Can't Mr Hoon," she continued, "send our boys somewhere safer... like Fallujah or *(cont. p. 94)*


HIGH-WAISTED? I DON'T THINK SO!
RED IS SO LAST YEAR!
TRIM THOSE BROWS!
TONE THOSE ABS!
THAT BEARD SIMPLY HAS TO GO!
QUEER EYE FOR THE STRAIGHT SANTA
kirk & packer

CHRIS EVANS HOUSE SALE

GOVERNMENT TO CUT COST OF PUBLIC INQUIRIES

THE government yesterday announced measures to slash the spiralling cost of long and drawn-out public inquiries.

A government spokesman said, "We feel that the best way to deal with this problem is to commission a full-scale investigation which will be overseen by a senior figure who'll receive a six-figure fee for his troubles – plus expenses."

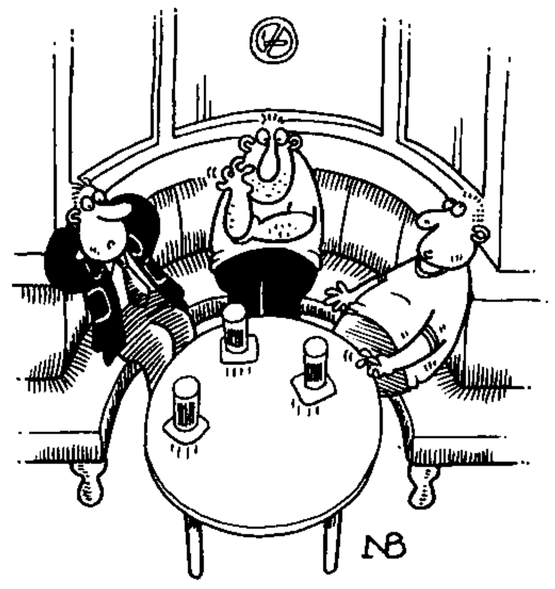
'RAILWAYS' PUNCTUALITY IMPROVES'

RAIL COMPANIES today proudly announced they'd exceeded their punctuality targets as, for the third year running, huge inflation-busting ticket price rises arrived right on schedule.

"A lot of work has been put in over the past twelve months, running the railways into the ground and cancelling trains," said the boss of one rail company, "thus ensuring we have the perfect excuse to justify hiking up the fares for long-suffering commuters, yet again claiming this money is needed to improve services.

"We've already begun work dismantling the service we provide over Christmas to cause maximum chaos over the festive period, thus ensuring another massive fare hike to fund so-called investment in the railways next year."

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



Rub-a-dub-dub,
Three men in a pub
Can't have a fag if
it also serves grub.

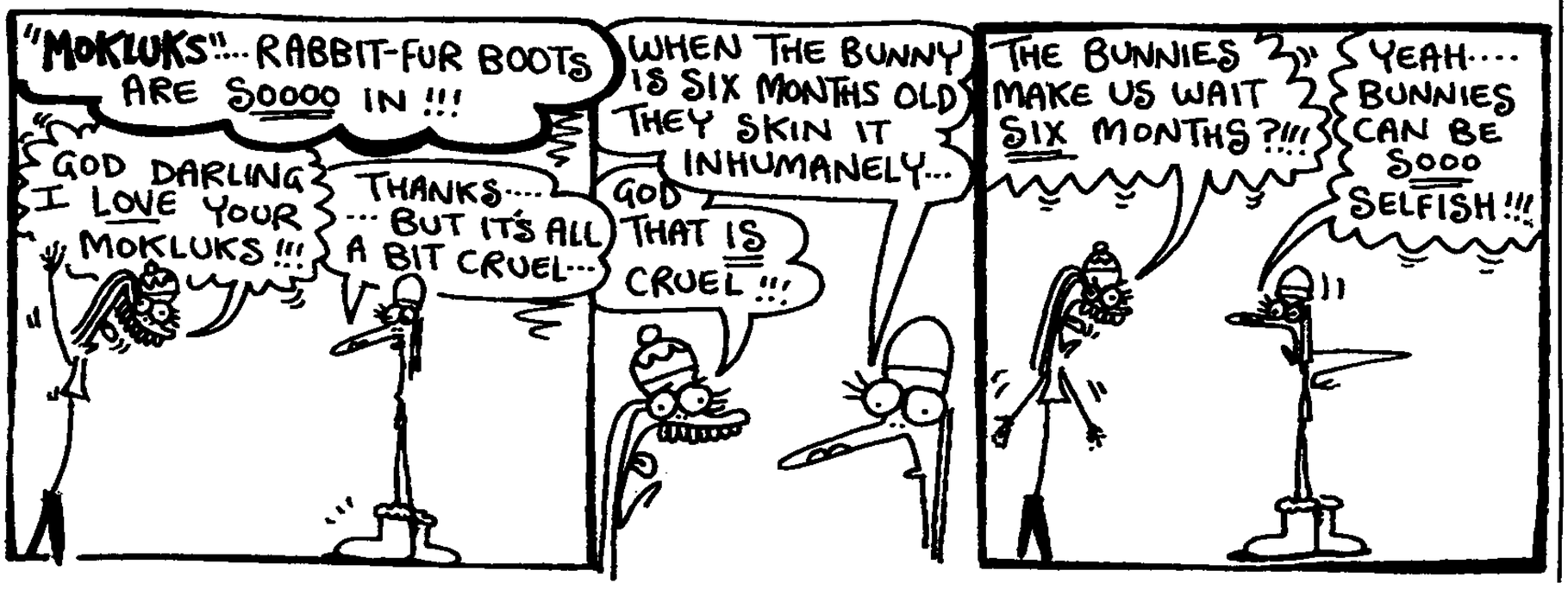
What are little girls
made of?
Cuppa-Soups and
Hula-Hoops –
That's what little girls are
made of.

What are little boys made
of?
Oven chips and chicken
dips –
That's what little boys are
made of.

Lavender's blue, dilly dilly,
Lavender's green.
When I am king, dilly dilly,
You won't be queen.

SUPERMODELS

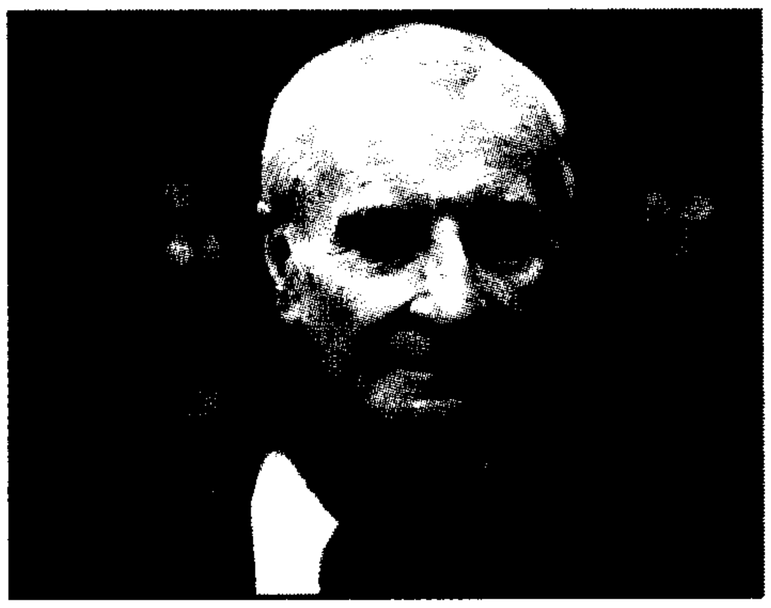
KERBER


"MOKLUKS"... RABBIT-FUR BOOTS ARE SOOOO IN !!!
GOD DARLING I LOVE YOUR MOKLUKS !!!
THANKS.... ... BUT IT'S ALL A BIT CRUEL...
WHEN THE BUNNY IS SIX MONTHS OLD THEY SKIN IT INHUMANELY...
GOD THAT IS CRUEL !!!
THE BUNNIES MAKE US WAIT SIX MONTHS ?!!!
YEAH.... BUNNIES CAN BE SOOO SELFISH !!!

MAKE EVERY INCH COUNT IN THE BEDROOM

Islington Gazette

DIARY



LINDSAY ANDERSON

December 4th 1974: England! What a horrid, class-ridden, snobbish nation, packed with the most ghastly common little low-brows.

Today I was forced to suffer a disgracefully expensive five-course luncheon at the Savoy with Arnold Wesker, who, I regret to say, certainly isn't up to much, intellectually speaking: I asked him to name five plays I had personally directed in the past three years – and he didn't even know!

But we agreed on the burning need for a truly savage and satirical film that skewers the fat-cats in our overblown, moribund, post-imperial society.

Suddenly, an impertinent suburban waiter interrupts us to ask if we would care for a sweet.

"'Care for a sweet?'" I complain bitterly, "*'Care for a sweet?'*!! What sort of a country are we living in when a functionary interrupts a highly serious discussion to ask if one would *care for a sweet!* Very well, I'll have the Black Forest Gateau – but only as a symbol of our overblown and tasteless age."

Outside the Savoy, a pompous hotel functionary in a top hat and braid asked if he could hail me a cab.

I told him in no uncertain terms that, as an anarchist, I was perfectly well equipped to hail one for myself. But the first cab drove straight past me with someone else in the back. I have never known such a kick in the teeth. I have been suppressed and disregarded in this country for decades – and now this! It's really too much.

December 5th 1974: Under Charing Cross Bridge, I am approached by a filthy-dirty beggar, his sordid hand outstretched. It is a pathetic sight, redolent of all that is wrong with this putrid country. I brush him away. He is in no sense an intellectual. These nonentities have no right whatsoever to interrupt serious artists while we engage with the problems of the day.

But what a perfect symbol! I make a mental note to insert a scene with a beggar into my forthcoming film, which is to be a bitter yet powerfully satirical attack on our capitalistic society. I can imagine a tremendously powerful scene in which the beggar is at last given the whip-hand, and the hard-hearted public school toff is sent to stew in a vat of his own urine, which I fancy I might dye vivid orange or mauve, thus adding to the scene's power.

December 6th 1974: Before luncheon at The Connaught with Richard Harris, I permit myself to savour the fantasy of renewing my relationship with one of the most potent sexual animals in the world.

He arrives at the table, still with that animal presence about him. In seconds, he is on all fours, gnawing at the table, lifting his leg and demanding more Scotch. How I yearn to get down there with him, beneath the table, and together we could indulge in doggy games!

Instead, I make my usual mistake of endeavouring to act honourably, as well as professionally. I call the little waiter over and demand more bread rolls, then I throw one to Richard, who continues to pant and bark below the table.

Halfway through our Prawn Cocktails, Richard vomits over the table-cloth. What animal magnetism the man has! I say nothing, but I shall always cherish this image of him vomiting over the table-cloth. It is, I think, vomit of the highest intellectual calibre, yet with an abundance of tangible realism.

Some sort of vulgar apparatchik comes to our table and asks magisterially if he can clean Richard's vomit away. This country really is becoming more and more impossible! How dare they? The man is the most powerful actor the world has ever seen, and they honestly think they can just clear his vomit away!

December 7th 1974: To the Royal Court Theatre, where I am directing Hamlet. No director has ever managed to penetrate to the central core of the essential meaning of the play, which is surely that Hamlet is a bloated symbol of post-war capitalism, that Gertrude is not his mother but his younger brother, and that Claudius (fitted with a long-overdue colostomy for my production), far from being a "King" in the old-fashioned sense of the word, is in fact a put-upon worker in the benighted steel industry. Turn this vital key, and the whole Shakespearean conundrum is unlocked!

In the afternoon, I direct a television advertisement for Watney's Party Six. I am informed it is some sort of cheap and revolting type of fizzy beer. The filming takes place in a pub, with hundreds of cheery "locals" raising their glasses and "making merry". How disagreeable and capitalistic it all is! But I am able to sneak a dead owl with an arrow through its heart into the bottom left hand corner of the final shot. It is for me a Brechtian device signifying the death of post-industrial society, but I very much doubt whether the ignoramuses to whom this advertisement is directed will hear much beyond the strains of "Roll Out the Barrel!" sung by The Mike Sammes Singers (not one of them in any sense an intellectual).

December 8th 1974: All those years of my valiantly (foolishly? Quixotically?) standing up for British cinema are not so much disregarded as despised.

I felt this most strongly and – yes – *upsettingly* when the woman behind the counter in the bakery served a nondescript fellow before me even though he had quite clearly come in after me. How dare she?! How bloody DARE she? If this is the way they treat a man who has spent the best part of his life struggling on a pittance to revive British cinema, well, I sometimes think that Britain thoroughly DESERVES to sink beneath the pus spewed out by one great septic tidal wave.

"Now what can I get you, sir?" the wretched woman says with a sly, ingratiating smile. I realise in a flash that she is in no sense an intellectual.

I am about to ask her if she realises that I am the director of last year's Cannes prize-winning film – but, oh bloody hell, why should I *bother*? The working class never seem to care the foggiest who's on their wretched side, who's batting for them against this bloated, destructive age. For all they care, I might as well be one of them!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

IT'S SHOCKING TO READ THE FIGURES ON DRUG ABUSE OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS, JOHNSON...
DO YOU KNOW: ORGANISED CRIME HAS CYNICALLY FORCED THE PRICE OF COCAINE DOWN SO FAR THAT A LINE IS NOW CHEAPER THAN A GLASS OF WINE!
WHAT SORT OF SOCIETY ARE WE LIVING IN, JOHNSON? SOMETHING OUGHT TO BE DONE.
QUITE SO, SIR...
I'LL CALL YOUR DEALER AND DEMAND A REBATE, SIR...
HE'S BEEN RIPPING ME OFF FOR YEARS!

Literary Review

Christmas Log Rolling

Books of the Year

BROADSHEET literary editors generally complain that they enjoy only two types of conversation with the taskmaster in the suit who lives along the corridor: one in which our man complains of the lack of famous names on the books pages; another in which he demands a further cut in the books pages budget. (There is a third conversation, touching the incompatibility of these approaches, which no literary editor who values his or her job ever cares to embark on).

How gratified, consequently, these exacting overseers must be by the annual Books of the Year round-ups in which the great and the good deliver their seasonal choices: page after page – sometimes as many as three or four per paper – crammed to the brim with people one has heard of, none of whom (as these things are contributed *gratis*) will ever trouble the accounts department. The wonder is that the principle isn't applied to other parts of the cultural firmament – TV, say, or film – with the aim of producing the first entirely contributor-fee free culture section.

However traditional a feature of the pre-Christmas books pages, and however beloved of editors, Books of the Year features are not what they were. In olden times you simply puffed your friends and got on with it. These days, sadly, transparency is all ("For the record none of the above is personally known to me or has ever reviewed me" Francis King remarked somewhat severely in the *Spectator*). It took courage, therefore, for Julie Myerson to commend a novel by Jonathan Coe to readers of the *New Statesman*, for D.J. Taylor to commend Coe's biography of B.S. Johnson to readers of the *Spectator*, and for Philip Hensher to commend Ms Myerson's own book about her agreeable house in Clapham to readers of the *Observer*. The connections are known: people will talk.

No, these days you have to be super-subtle, find new ways to scratch that back which in some cases may not even appear to involve a hand being raised. One sound move is to plump for books whose authors sit next to you in the same publisher's catalogue. Thus the three darling items selected by Hanif Kureishi in the *Observer* just happened to be published by Faber, who quite by chance turn out to be Kureishi's own commercial sponsor. Another smart scheme is to try a joke. "Since Robert McCrum is the literary editor of this paper, I should refrain from mentioning his absorbing, compassionate *P.G. Wodehouse: A Life*," began Kazuo Ishiguro's *Observer* glad-handing of his former publisher.

Or there is the infallible habit of pundits to approve the books of people who write for the same newspaper and in many cases will be appearing a few centimetres above them on the same page. In the *Sunday Telegraph* Miriam Gross and Christopher Bland both went for Max Hastings' *Armageddon*, as the proud author gazed benevolently down on them from the top of the spread. Not to be outdone, Tom Stoppard performed a similar service for Paul Johnson's *The Vanished Landscape*.

Two other regular book round-up treats are, on the one hand, showing off, and, on the other, framing general principles about literature which indirectly flatter one's own work. Eric Griffiths in the *Evening Standard* wrote movingly about a couple of Italian books which "might make revealing holiday-reading for some in 2005". Over the page Jeanette Winterson, complimenting David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, declared that "Fiction should do more than tell a story. Its concerns should also be poetic and symbolic". Meanwhile, in the *New Statesman* Amanda Craig suggested that Alan Hollinghurst's Booker-winning *The Line of Beauty* "reasserts the supremacy of the classical novel over the sort of experimental tosh still venerated by fashionable critics". Over both these statements of critical intent hung the invisible message "Like what I write".

Some redoubts of the book world will never change, of course, and indeed take a positive pride in their unreconstructed state. Thus the *Spectator* had P.J. Kavanagh praising *Basil D'Oliviera: Cricket and Conspiracy, The Untold Story* by Peter Oborne, the magazine's political correspondent; the Duchess of Devonshire recommending a book by her late husband; and Hugh Massingberd exulting over a novel by his fast friend A.N. Wilson.

Judged by weight of votes, the people's choices for 2004 were the Hollinghurst, Colm Toibin's *The Master*, David Lodge's *Author, Author*, Coe's life of Johnson and the multi-volume £7,500 a set *New Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. In a scorching year, the prize for the most inconspicuous piece of flattery goes to Roy Hattersley's recommendation of Robert Skidelsky's one-volume compression of his life of Maynard Keynes to readers of the *New Statesman*. The literary editor who commissioned this offering is Skidelsky's son.

Books & Bookmen

■ WHILE Transworld waits for John Peel's widow to finish the DJ's memoirs, other less contractually-bound publishers are rushing out the inevitable cash-ins.

First up, just pipping Michael O'Mara with Michael Heatley's *John Peel: A Life in Music*, are Mick Wall and Orion with *John Peel*: a tribute to the hugely popular DJ and broadcaster. For their £15, buyers get something that superficially resembles a proper hardback biography, but which on closer inspection is very poor value. Wall's main qualification for being Peel's biographer is that he has knocked out similar cash-ins and that Peel once showed him how to use a BBC coffee machine. The book is about as deep and meaningful as this encounter.

The slenderness of the text, little of which could not have been gleaned from newspapers or the internet, is bolstered by print only marginally smaller than that used in books for the partially-sighted. Meanwhile, the last quarter of the book is bulked out by complete listings of Peel's Festive 50 charts from 1976 to last year. Given that Wall must have been pitching the idea while Peel was still warm to get anything out in time for Christmas, it is fanciful to imagine him faithfully transcribing the charts himself from off-air recordings. More likely he lifted them wholesale from www.rocklist.net/festive50.htm, which comes at the top of any Google search for "Festive 50".

Wall and Orion know it's hard to claim copyright in a simple list, and that the internet seems to be a free-for-all; but that doesn't make them profiting from the hard work of an unpaid and uncredited fan any less shabby.

■ REVIEWERS of *The Secret Annexe*: an anthology of war diaries by Irene and Alan Taylor, just published by Canongate, seem particularly taken with the extensive quotations from *Nazi Lady*: the diaries of Elisabeth von Stahlenberg, originally published in 1978 by Anthony Blond.

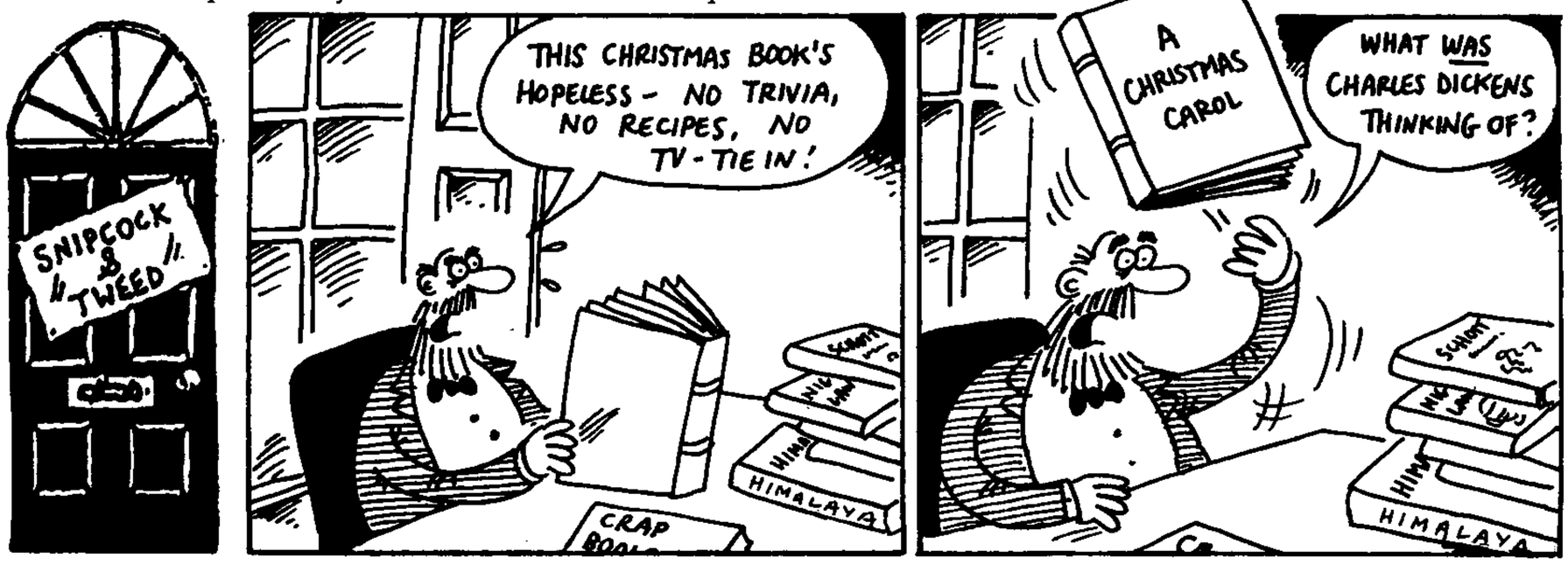
The extracts were singled out for praise by both John Carey in his *Sunday Times* review of the anthology and David Robinson in his *Scotsman* review; but Carey, Robinson and the Taylors seem unaware that *Nazi Lady* was a work of fiction written by Gillian Freeman at Blond's instigation.

At the time of publication, no less a military historian than Alan Clark did a Trevor-Roper and declared it "indisputably genuine... a contemporary document of the highest importance..." Just a few weeks later, however, the *Evening Standard* revealed the book's true provenance. Subsequent editions were credited clearly to Freeman, and she now expresses surprise that this "entirely fictitious" work "has resurfaced as genuine and the story has come full circle".

■ TWENTY years after its first appearance in America, *The War Magician* by David Fisher – which claims to tell the story of the wartime exploits of famed illusionist Jasper Maskelyne – has been reissued by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in anticipation of a film version starring Tom Cruise.

It seems, however, that Maskelyne's greatest illusion was the version of his life set down in his autobiography, *Magic Top Secret*, upon which Fisher relied heavily.

Maskelyne's son Alistair has revealed to Richard Stokes, an inde-



pendent researcher, that *Magic Top Secret* "was a ghost written largely fictional account of my father's western desert experiences. When I was given a preliminary draft to read in 1946 my comment to father was 'there is so much over-dramatised fiction here that it is obviously untrue'."

Maskelyne claimed that he was the brains behind Montgomery's deception plan at El Alamein, but according to Alistair Maskelyne and Stokes, it is unlikely that he was involved at any strategic level. Similarly unlikely are Maskelyne's claims that he fought a duel with the Imam, or that he ever demonstrated his camouflage and deception expertise to J Edgar Hoover. The doubts are such that director Peter Weir is understood to have pulled out of the film project.

There appear, however, to be no such qualms at Weidenfeld. "We're publishing the book as it's the basis for the screenplay," explains Ian Drury, Weidenfeld's non-fiction publishing director, cheerfully. "If a Hollywood film is playing fast and loose with the facts, it wouldn't be the first time."

As to the inaccuracy of Maskelyne's original burnished accounts, Drury says simply that "aspects of the accounts of desert fighting have been overtaken by more modern research". Incidentally, this is the same Ian Drury who, two years ago, was the proud publisher of *The Real Bravo Two Zero* by Michael Asher. In Drury's words, Asher showed Gulf War SAS-men Andy McNab and Chris Ryan to be "charlatans" – but was Jasper Maskelyne any less of a charlatan?

■ SEEDY Palestiniaan parfumier Naim Attallah has intensified his campaign against his long-suffering former ghostwriter Jenny Erdal, whose brilliant memoir *Ghosting* describes their unique relationship.

Attallah-Disgusting is threatening writs against papers that reviewed the book – including the *Independent* and the *Scotsman* – no doubt in the hope of frightening the publishers, Canongate.

But this bullying may backfire. At the centre of the litigation is a love-letter allegedly written by Erdal on Attallah's behalf to his good lady wife, Maria. However, the question so far unasked is not what Erdal put in her book but what she left out. Rumour has it that Attallah-Disgusting was also sending ghosted love-letters – and even love-poems! – to other ladies.

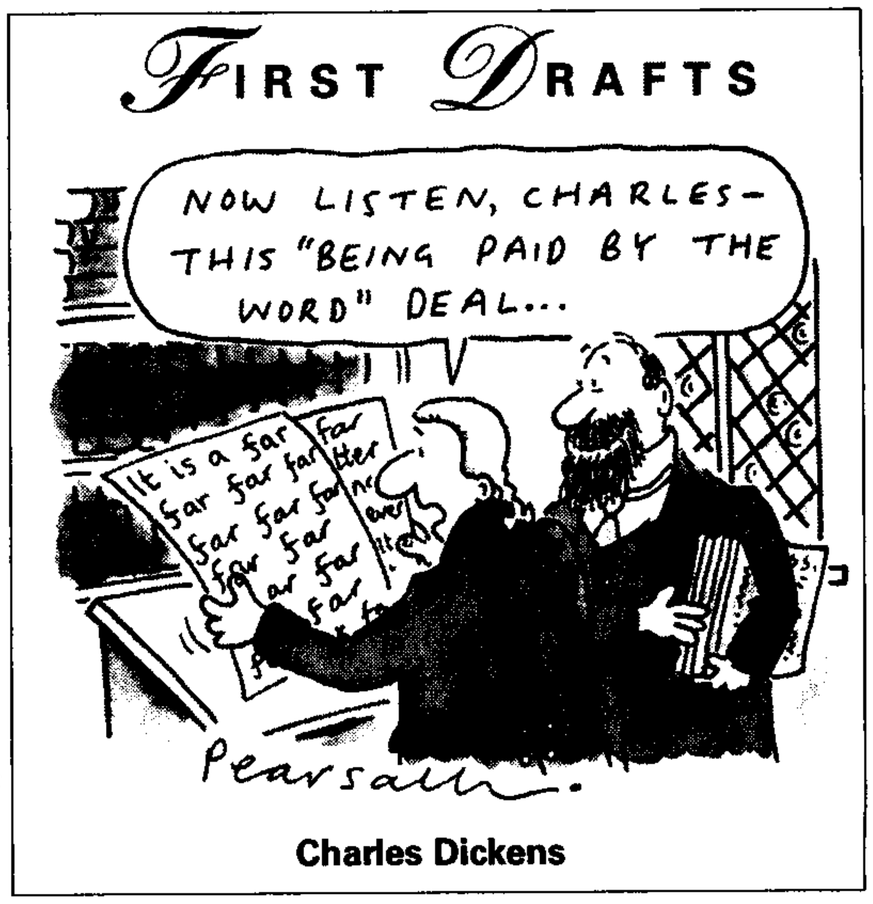
He should be grateful for her tact and discretion. If he pursues his libel case she'll have to divulge further embarrassing details, and the courtroom drama will turn into a modern-dress production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

■ IN THE *Guardian*'s Books of the Year round-up, Giles Foden declined to offer the usual plugs for friends and colleagues, instead plumping for a spectacularly pseudy puff-piece for his own forthcoming novel, mentioning in passing a work which was published five years ago.

"The Oulipo – in full, the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle, or Workshop for Potential Literature – was founded in France in 1960 by the author Raymond Queneau. Its purpose was to explore the use of mathematics in the creation of fictional texts. As this is something I'm doing in my current novel, I checked out *The Oulipo Compendium* by Harry Matthews and Alaistair Brotchie (Atlas) and it blew my head off.

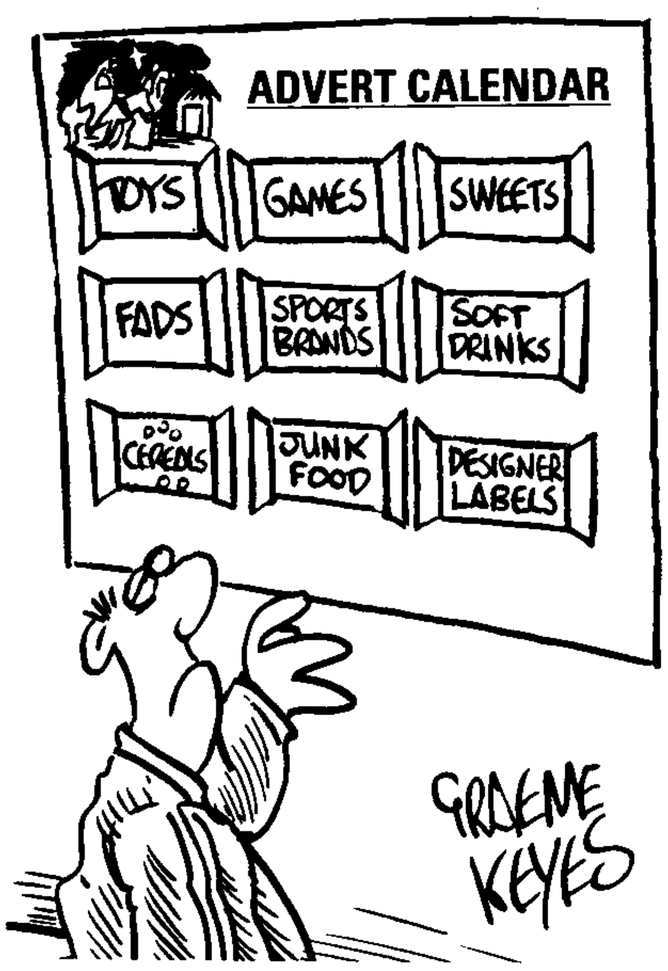
"My own compositional sequence involves the number eight, remarkable in a wide variety of languages in that if you add an 'n' to it, you get night: noche, nuit, notte, nacht, etc. N7 would then not be a London postal district but dusk, the holy moment when fish rise..."

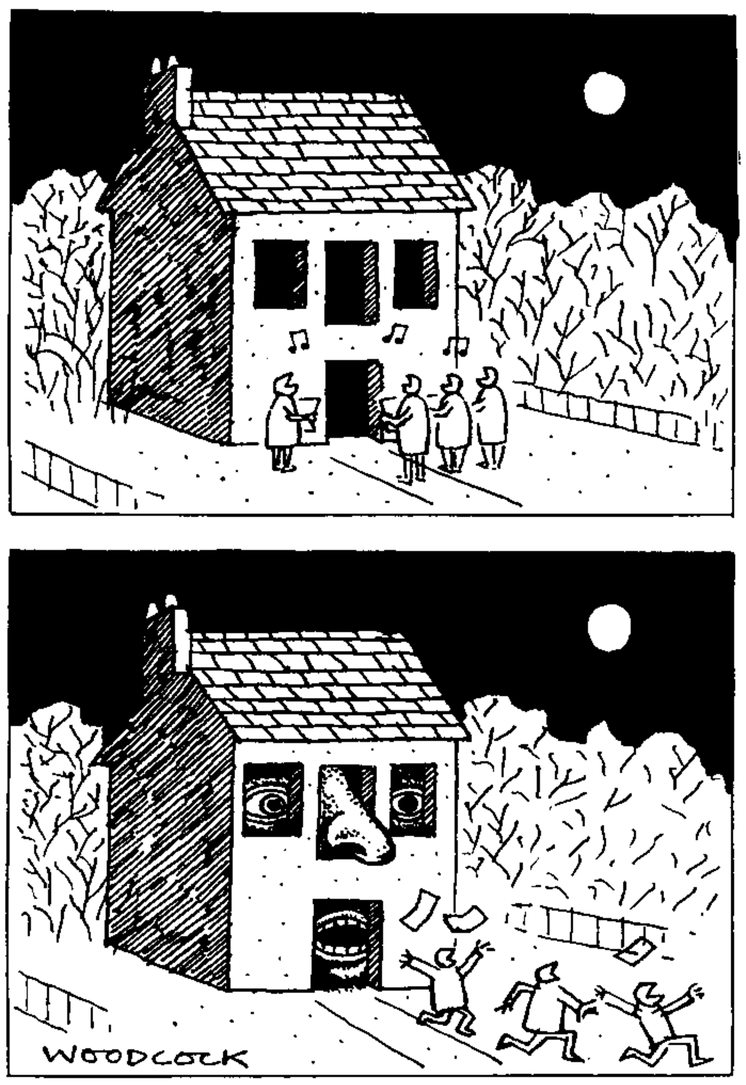
'Bookworm'

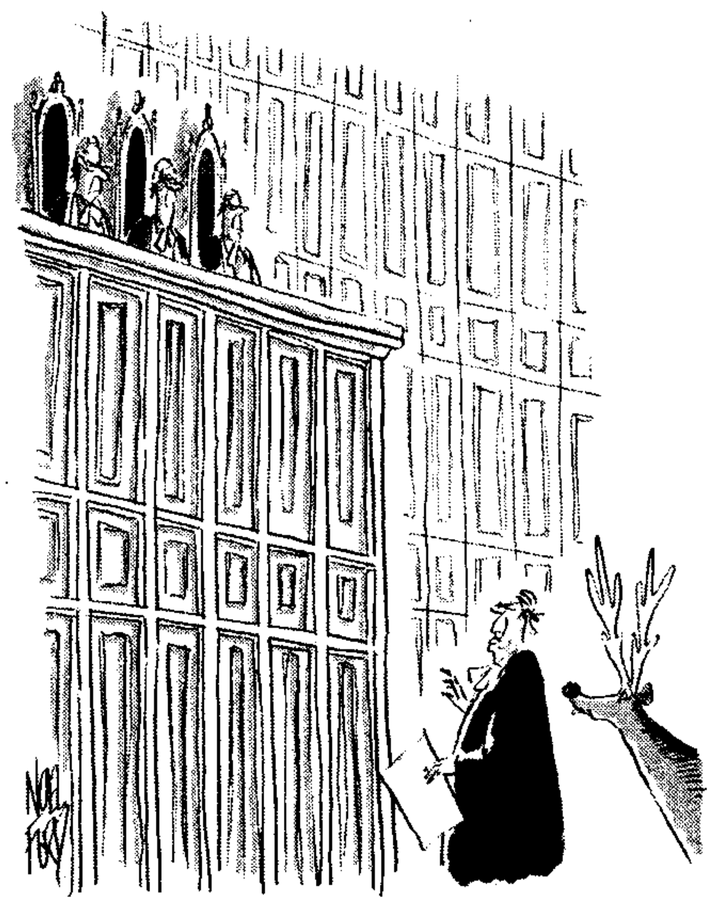

FIRST DRAFTS
NOW LISTEN, CHARLES- THIS "BEING PAID BY THE WORD" DEAL...
It is a far far far

"Oh no! It's Conrad Black!"

"I see those shits Marion and Peter have sent us a card"







"...and with blatant disregard for my client's rights and the law regarding disability discrimination, all of the other reindeer laughed, called him names and wouldn't let him join in any of their reindeer games."

"Gangmaster – that's such an ugly expression"

IN THE BACK

IMMIGRATION

FAST-TRACK FIASCO

HOME office "fast-tracking" might work for well-connected Filipina nannies, but for desperate asylum-seekers the consequences can be dire.

No sooner had immigration minister Des Browne lifted the ban on returning Zimbabweans to the warm embrace of Robert Mugabe last month, than several were rounded up and put on a flight bound for Harare.

Among them was Crispen Kulinji, 32, a well-known opposition activist in Zimbabwe who, unlike most asylum-seekers, had a mass of documents supporting his claim for asylum. These included press reports of the raid on his home in Harare by the Zimbabwean National Army (ZNA) in which he was abducted, tortured and left for dead, his mother was raped and his sister was beaten.

Only a last-minute intervention by supporters in Britain and the Conservative MP Peter Bottomley led to Mr Kulinji being removed from the flight. But his reprieve, and his stay at the Harmondsworth immigration centre near Heathrow, could be shortlived.

After Mr Kulinji was seized from his home in Harare, he spent four months in hospital with serious head, internal and leg injuries – all of which were verifiable, as was his role as organising secretary for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change in Zimbabwe.

Nevertheless Mr Kulinji was fast-tracked through Britain's asylum process and ordered out of the country.

Mr Kulinji's problem was that he had arrived in the UK two months earlier on a Malawian passport – pretty much the only way Zimbabweans can now get into the UK since the government introduced a visa regime for their country in 2002. The intention had been to deport him to Malawi; but as he is not Malawian supporters say he was at serious risk of being sent straight back to Zimbabwe from there. In addition, the flight he was put on stopped in Harare first and few doubt that such a well-known opposition figure would have been whisked off the flight in the Zimbabwean capital.

The trouble is that no matter how good one's evidence in support of an asylum claim, fast-tracking does not allow enough time for it to be investigated, there are serious reservations about the quality of lawyers contracted to do the fast-track work and very little legal aid is available. Hence genuine asylum seekers slip through the net.

At Mr Kulinji's initial interview with an immigration officer he asked for time to obtain medical records to verify his claims. He was told these were unlikely to affect the decision which was likely to be made the next day. At his appeal, it was decided that this was Kulinji's second Malawian passport and the UK would not be in breach of its legal obligations if he were sent to Malawi.

It was only after protest by the Zimbabwean exile community at Gatwick airport as his plane was due to take off and the 11th hour intervention of Tory MP Peter Bottomley that Mr Kulinji was removed from the flight. Others have not been so lucky.

In the row over England's cricket tour of Zimbabwe, foreign office ministers like Chris Mullin and the leader of the Commons Peter Hain have loudly condemned the Mugabe regime. Why the home office should at the same time start deportations to the "murderous" country is a mystery, especially as the UN high commissioner for refugees has urged against it.

Immigration minister Browne claims the ban had to be lifted because it had been exploited. "We need to stop this abuse while continuing to offer protection to genuine refugees," he said. But Mr Kulinji's reprieve will be shortlived. Des Browne has told MPs, and Lord Avebury who had also taken up his case, that the home office remains convinced Mr Kulinji will be safe if he is sent to Malawi. Only this time he will be sent via Nairobi or Addis Ababa and not Harare. So that's all right then.

DEEPCUT BARRACKS

Soldiers sold out

THE government's determination to make itself look ridiculous by blocking a proper public inquiry into disturbing events at Deepcut barracks in Surrey is causing bafflement and unease at Westminster and among campaigners.

Faced with new revelations about rape, abuse and bullying at the barracks, armed forces minister Adam Ingram was obliged to announce yet another review. But he has no intention of allowing this mini-inquiry to look into the four suspicious deaths at the barracks – despite strong evidence that at least two of the dead recruits were victims of exactly the sort of mistreatment outlined in these latest allegations.

Ingram's inquiry will take place behind closed doors, yet the minister brazenly told the Commons: "There is no question of a cover-up." So that's all right, then.

The background to the new allegations offers more evidence of systemic problems at the camp at the time of the deaths. Surrey police's list of 173 serious allegations covers just three of the eight years between the first and last deaths, raising fears that the real number of incidents and allegations could be far higher.

Where did all the claims come from? Some emerged from the questioning of soldiers during the Surrey police investigation of the deaths (a report completed more than a year ago that remains secret). But detectives also stumbled on another remarkable source of information: the Deepcut guardroom logs, a daily diary of events recording, among other things, incidents of self-harm, and worse, among recruits.

When Surrey chief superintendent Craig Denholm recently testified to the Commons defence committee which is looking into the MoD's duty of care to recruits, he described one log entry about a female soldier who reported being raped in male quarters but was warned that if she didn't shut up she would be charged for entering male accommodation. Denholm said that was how the incident appeared, more or less, in the log and, like other entries, was "signed off" by a senior NCO. Yet police found no evidence of any senior officer investigating the claims or taking them seriously. MPs were aghast, with one committee member declaring that it should have been reported straight to the commanding officer. "That did not happen," Denholm said.

The officers in charge at Deepcut while all this was going on, lieutenant colonels Nigel Barrie Josling and his successor Ronald Laden, have kept remarkably low profiles; and families of the Deepcut recruits last week expressed concern that the pair would not be called to answer questions before the defence committee.

Although they are likely to be called by Ingram's latest mini-inquiry, there will be no chance for the families to quiz them about their regimes. Josling, in charge when the first two deaths occurred in 1995, was given an OBE in last year's new year's honours.

PROPERTY OUTSOURCING

Mapeley mayhem

AS negotiations continue to start *using* Northern Ireland's Assembly building at Stormont again after two years of suspension, the building itself is set to be flogged to a property company. It will be part of a £500m property outsourcing deal by the Northern Ireland authority, following the lead of the Inland Revenue and the department for work and pensions.

Bermuda-based Mapeley, whose controversial offshore ownership of the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise estate has often been featured in these pages, is reported to be bidding for the contract against fellow property giant Trillium Land Securities.

So how is life for the tax collectors and customs workers now working in the Mapeley-run buildings? Dark and dangerous.

When the lighting circuit went out in one building, the cheapskate firm decided that rather than call in an electrician, it would string bulbs around the office in a fairy light-like arrangement.

This was not an isolated incident. In one office Mapeley refused to get the fire alarm system fixed because of the cost. Only when the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) threatened to treat it as a health and safety emergency was anything done. The PCS reports "a significant degree of inertia on the part of Mapeley to undertake their health and safety obligations… in some cases [they] have only accepted their obligations hours before the attendance of the Health and Safety Executive."

Mapeley has also refused several organisations access to their buildings, including the Civil Service Insurance Society, a not-for-profit insurance company providing financial services to public sector workers – such as those working in the buildings.

Not only is the level of service shoddy, but the price is still rocketing up. The Commons public accounts committee (PAC) had Mapeley chief executive Jamie Hopkins in for questioning last month and was concerned to note that the contract, meant to cost £170m a year is in fact running at more than £300m. It also heard that contract negotiations are still going on, two years after the deal was signed. Hopkins and the Revenue bosses said the negotiations should be over by next April.

ARAFAT'S BILLIONS

Sting in the tale

JUST over a fortnight after the death of Yasser Arafat, the first email scam concerning his $6.5bn fortune arrived at *Private Eye*.

"My dear," thousands of email users were greeted. "I am the Wife of President Yasser Arafat Leader Palestinian Liberation Organisation who died today after a brief illness. I took time off my tight schedule and in tears with fear all over my vein to write you personally."

Citing her fear that "the PLO members are after my husband fund indirectly", Mrs Arafat proposes a deal with terms almost identical to the classic "Nigerian Scam" which has been circulating for the last decade: recipients are requested to forward their bank details to "Barrister Kabilla Mannasse who is in a French island country called Gabon for security reasons", and will receive in return a generous 25 percent of the late Palestinian leader's estate!

In the Back continues overleaf ☛

THAMES WATER

SOMETHING STINKS

THE announcement last week of a huge hike in water charges will bring no immediate relief to those using or living near the River Thames, which regularly receives tonnes of untreated sewage and other "personal items" courtesy of Thames Water.

After last month's deluge of raw sewage, sanitary wear and condoms into the river, two teams from Rowers Against Thames Sewage (RATS) raced down the Thames towing 14ft inflatable turds behind them to highlight the failure of the government and Environment Agency to tackle the problem and the increasing risk to human and animal life.

In fact it's a common problem. In August a sudden deluge overwhelmed the capital's drains and Thames Water had to discharge around 650,000 tonnes of raw sewage into the river, killing around 10,000 fish. This was but a bad example of something that happens around 50 to 60 times year; and since August Thames Water – a subsidiary of the German multinational RWE – has pumped over five million more tonnes of raw muck into the river. There have been eight discharges of a similar size over this year; the biggest being on 3 May when a staggering three million tonnes went in one go. So-called fish kills occur every 10 to 16 weeks.

Thames Water is one of the country's most shameful polluters, regularly among the top three of the Environment Agency's worst offenders. But its pollution of the River Thames is in fact licensed and the company cannot be prosecuted for it. The reason is that Thames Water still relies on the Victorian sewage system which fills with rainwater during heavy downpours, preventing raw sewage from reaching treatment plants. If Thames Water didn't open the floodgates into the river, the sewage would pour into streets and houses.

Members of RATS and other campaigners maintain, however, that discharges have occurred even during extended periods of hot, dry weather; and that the ability to dump untreated sewage into the river represents major savings for Thames Water. The company has certainly done little to expand capacity of the system or to reroute stormwater and keep it out of the sewers in the first place. Sewage plants like those at Sutton and Kew have even been shut and sold for development.

In 2000 a £4m study agreed by both the Environment Agency and Thames Water concluded that the only way to deal with the problem was to build a huge £1.5bn, 22-mile storage tunnel under the Thames, which won't be ready until about 2020. But the government has rejected it as too costly and too distant and, four years down the line, is still exploring "other options".

In fact it has merely ordered another inquiry – this time into the effects on public health (canoeists and others using the Thames have long reported increased cases of gastro-intestinal illnesses associated with a river full of faecal matter.

Thames Water complains that its massive 18 percent rise in charges, allowed by OFWAT, is far short of the 29 percent it wants and is not enough for work it needs to carry out over the next five years, at least shareholders aren't going short. Last month it was revealed that parent company RWE (53 on the Fortune 500 index) had siphoned £500m in dividends from Thames Water since it took over the company four years ago – money that would have gone a long way to funding new sewerage and rain tunnels.

Scouting for profits

THE Scout Association plans to sell off 11 of its campsites which it says are failing to turn a profit.

Although there are around 800 campsites of varying sizes owned by individual scout groups or county associations, the Scouting HQ owns 14 large sites for camping and activity holidays. With a decline in the number of scouts going camping, the association says the people who lease and run the sites have been unable to make them pay. It plans to keep just three sites and develop them into fancy activity centres with the money raised from the other sites.

At the popular Kingsdown campsite in Kent, used by 10,000 children a year, managers Charlie and Sue Leadbetter say that far from making a loss, the 37-acre site is in an "extremely healthy financial position". The costs of operating a scout camp are relatively low, since most of the summer staff on the site are volunteers.

Kent scouts were offered the chance to buy Kingsdown from HQ for just over £1m – money they simply don't have.

Scout leaders in the county have condemned the steep price tag as greedy and morally wrong, especially when the campsite was a gift to the movement from one of the earliest scouts, Percy Bantock Nevill, to enable boys to enjoy the outdoors. They also think that the sale may breach the terms of the deed under which the land was given. The charity commission is investigating.

The Scout Association says that if local groups don't buy the land, it would be keen to sell the sites to companies outside the scouting movement who wanted to carry on operating them as campsites. But a spokesman told the *Eye,* the association didn't rule out selling the land to developers. The future of the sites will then be in the hands of local planners who may well allow house-building on them or perhaps use them for traveller sites.

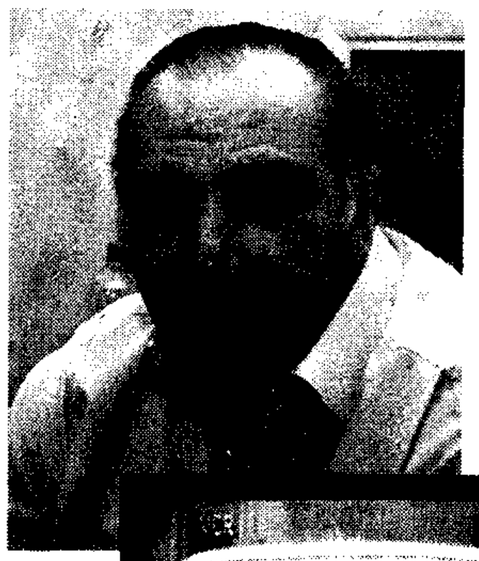
"We want to get the best opportunity for young people to experience the outdoors, but not by running everywhere on a shoestring," he added.

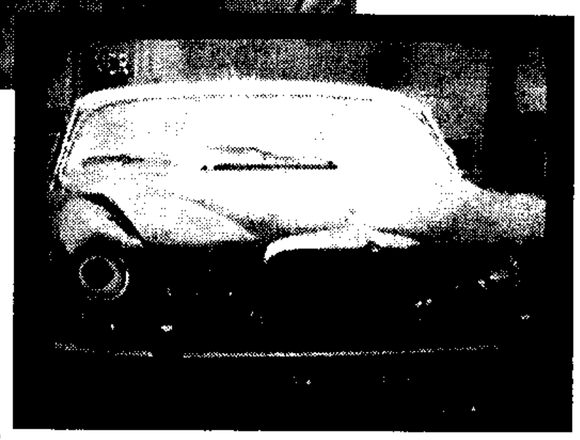
With badges for "public relations" (sponsored by British Energy) having replaced the old fashioned skills of knot-tying, it's no wonder the Scouts can't do anything on a shoestring these days.

MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE

Better late than never?

THIRTY SEVEN years after he was jointly convicted of the notorious gangland killing known as the "one-armed bandit murder", Michael Luvaglio (pictured right) may finally be able to clear his name.





A detailed file on the case (reputed to have inspired the gangster film *Get Carter*), is before the criminal cases review commission. Although the commission is being starved of funds and has a growing backlog, it has agreed to expedite the case because of 67-year-old Luvaglio's serious ill health.

In one the country's oldest miscarriage of justice cases, Luvaglio was convicted with playboy crook Dennis Stafford of the execution-style shooting of Angus Sibbett, found dead in the back of his Jaguar by Durham miners on the their way to work. Sibbett had been an employee of Luvaglio's brother, Vince Landa, who supplied one-armed bandits to working men's clubs in the north east.

Both men have always protested their innocence, claiming they were at a nightclub in Newcastle 18 miles away waiting for Sibbett when the murder occurred. They also went briefly to Luvaglio's house to await a phone call from his brother and were seen by a neighbour. The prosecution case hinged on a period of around 45 minutes for which the police claimed the pair could not prove their alibi and on a claim that the men's red E type Jaguar had been in collision with Sibbett's Mark Ten Jag (see picture).

The case has long been the subject of serious doubts. A book highlighting the many flaws in the police case and pointing to a grave injustice was published in 1971. Stafford, a career criminal who had escaped from Dartmoor and mocked police, was an obvious target for suspicion. Luvaglio claims he was told by police on the night of his arrest that he had only to say that Stafford had left him for an hour or so that night and he would be released. He refused and was charged alongside Stafford.

Ten years after the crime was committed, a petty villain from Glasgow, John Tumblety, said he had driven the real murderer back to Newcastle from the scene of the crime. But two previous appeals, each casting more doubt on the safety of the convictions, failed and both men served 12 years before being released in 1979, still protesting their innocence.

The new evidence is said to cast further doubt on the police account of the time of the murder and on the damage to the two cars. It includes more than 100 statements, many of which undermine the prosecution case but which were never disclosed at the time.

On his release from jail Luvaglio was found a job as a charity worker by the late Lord Longford, and had initially not sought to continue his fight to clear his name for fear of embarrassing the charity. But now retired he has resumed the fight alongside Stafford – and with some urgency as he is seriously ill.

FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **ROGER SYLVESTER:** A high court judge's decision to quash an inquest jury's "unlawful killing" verdict by police officers involved in restraining Roger Sylvester, a mentally ill man, has alarmed those campaigning against restraint-related deaths in police custody.

Deborah Coles of Inquest, which campaigns on behalf of the families of those who die while in state care, said the ruling and the judge's failure to order another inquest meant "no one is held accountable for the death of a healthy black man".

There has long been concern about methods used by police and prison officers to restrain people – often those with mental illness – particularly if they are placed faced down. Despite better training and greater awareness of the risks, there have been 65 restraint-related deaths in police custody in the last 10 years.

Last week an inquest opened in Windsor into the death of Giles Freemen, a 37-year-old suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, who was restrained at Slough police station.

PENSIONS & ENDOWMENTS

WHAT A BLOOMER

WHO is the last person who should be put in charge of appointing the new top enforcement official at Britain's financial regulator?

Obviously a prominent endowment mis-seller wouldn't be a great idea – but that is exactly who the financial services authority (FSA) chose. In searching for a new suit to head its regulatory decisions committee (RDC), the FSA turned to a nominations committee chaired by one Jonathan Bloomer, chief executive of Prudential and chairman of the financial services practitioners panel.

The previous head of the RDC, Chris Fitzgerald QC, had to resign in the summer after he discussed an appeal against one of his decisions with the judge who was hearing the appeal.

Mr Bloomer's qualifications for assessing the suitability of a replacement for this sensitive job include presiding over the mis-selling of thousands of mortgage endowment policies by Prudential subsidiary Scottish Amicable during 2000, for which the company was fined £750,000 by the FSA last year. The large fine, said the FSA, "reflects the serious nature of the firm's failings, in particular, its failure to act adequately in response to guidance issued by the regulator".

The Pru's top man was also a leading member of the company's board while it mis-sold even more private pensions during the 1990s.

Bloomer's choice to run the RDC was Tim Herrington, a partner in city law firm Clifford Chance, one of whose most important clients is, er, Prudential. Herrington has promised to stand aside when the RDC has to punish one of his former clients, which clearly answers any doubts over the probity of the FSA's enforcement process.

Feast in the east

PENSIONS and endowments mis-selling looks set to become the next great British export. As the industry has been rumbled here, the big insurance companies are turning to untapped markets.

"I have choices on where capital can be deployed and I can deploy it in markets that give a more sensible rate of return," sulked Sandy Crombie, chief executive of Standard Life, a couple of weeks ago.

The markets he had in mind are largely in Asia, where billions of people haven't heard of mis-selling. Nor will they be aware of Standard Life's habit of breaking its promises on the returns it will pay to savers (see *Eye* 1118).

Prudential has already established a huge Asian business, and last month Jonathan Bloomer (see *What a Bloomer*) took around 50 market analysts on a tour of the company's Vietnamese and Malaysian operations. Whether these countries will reward him for ripping-off their citizens with high-profile positions in financial regulation remains to be seen.

Friends of the boss

THE government's pension protection fund (PPF) was set up so that members of failed company schemes would at least get some of their money. But as workers at companies across Britain are discovering, when an employer goes belly-up it's generally the less well-paid employee, not the director, whose pension suffers.

The *Eye* has already reported the strange choice of former pensions mis-seller Lawrence Churchill to chair the PPF. But now work and pensions secretary Alan Johnson, a former Marxist and general secretary of the Communication Workers Union, has named the rest of the PPF board.

They are Ian Abrams, director of Mizuho International; Mark Baker, former chairman of Magnox Electric; Michael Deakin, former director of Insight Investment; Christopher Hughes, former managing director of Wragge and co; and Jeannie Drake, member of the TUC council. So that's five bosses and one workers' rep to look after out-of-pocket scheme members.

TOBACCO SMUGGLING

BAT and balls

WHY are British tobacco manufacturers suddenly cooperating with the government in its battle against cigarette smuggling in a move that is sure to hit their business?

This U-turn emerged last month when more light was thrown on the relationship between the big tobacco businesses and the government during discussions before the treasury select committee.

Questioning Customs officials about tobacco smuggling, the committee learned that the three UK cigarette manufacturers British American Tobacco (BAT), Imperial and Gallagher have now signed a "memorandum of cooperation" with the government. The details are secret but appear to oblige the companies to be more circumspect about selling to obvious would-be criminals.

This is all in stark contrast to the industry's past profiteering from cigarette smuggling, exposed by a parliamentary health committee inquiry in 2000 when anti-smoking group Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) produced reams of evidence of how BAT had encouraged the illicit trade.

At the time BAT's deputy chairman, former Tory chancellor Ken Clarke, could only defend his firm's behaviour on the grounds that it was at least legal, testifying that "Where any government is unwilling to act or their efforts are unsuccessful, we act, completely within the law, on the basis that our brands will be available alongside those of our competitors in the smuggled as well as the legitimate market".

The committee ordered an investigation by the department of trade and industry (DTI) into whether BAT had done anything illegal, such as conspiring in the smuggling. After four years the investigators finally concluded earlier this year that BAT had not broken the law. To the disgust of campaigners, trade secretary Patricia Hewitt refused to publish the report, so the reasons for the finding remain secret.

Last month Customs officers claimed the new "memorandum of cooperation" was a great step forward. But Labour treasury committee member Nigel Beard saw the obvious point. "Never mind welcome development. Why is it that we have three major British companies which plainly up to now have not been co-operating… or you would not have needed the memoranda?"

Mr Beard might also have asked why, when four years ago the tobacco companies were happy to go along with smuggling, and the drawn-out DTI inquiry found nothing illegal, the firms are now cooperating to tackle the problem of contraband fags. Only a cynic would suggest the volte-face has something to do with the hushed-up DTI investigation that saw Clarke and BAT chairman Martin Broughton (now at the helm of British Airways) escape scot-free.

TAX AVOIDANCE

Barclays banker

DAYS before the chancellor denounced corporate tax avoidance in his pre-budget report, the difficulty of his task was exposed in the House of Lords where the country's top tax avoider, Barclays bank, was winning £30m in tax breaks for one of its cleverer wheezes.

A couple of years ago *Eye* 1062 reported how the bank had bought a pipeline from the Irish Gas Board (IGB), only to lease it straight back to IGB, who immediately deposited the sale proceeds with an offshore Barclays company. The bank kept its money and IGB its pipeline, so nothing really happened; but Barclays claimed £91m in "capital allowances" for the cost of the pipeline.

In the high court last year Mr Justice Park saw through the charade, declaring that "the transaction was really about creating a complex and sophisticated structure… with the real end product being… fiscal savings to be shared between the two of them and to be provided at the expense of the UK Revenue".

But the higher up the British courts the big tax avoiders go, the more sympathy they get. A panel of five law lords (Nicholls, Steyn, Hope, Hoffman and Walker) saw the same contrived transactions as mere "happenstances" and duly awarded the bank its massive tax break.

The deal was arranged in the mid-1990s by Barclays' investment banking arm Barclays de Zoet Wedd (BZW), now Barclays Capital. Chairman of BZW over this period was Peter Middleton (pictured), whose investment banking performance was so well-regarded that in 1999 he became chairman of the whole bank.

Following his retirement a couple of months ago the by now "Sir" Peter took over running the national lottery as chairman of Camelot, charged with raising as much money as possible for good causes. Many such causes are of course public services deprived of funds because of the kind of tax avoidance scheme so successfully executed by Sir Peter Middleton and chums over the years at Barclays bank.

Drug money

LAST WEEK's *Financial Times* supplement on "responsible business" touched on the tricky question of corporate tax avoidance, with some well-known companies taking the opportunity to distance themselves from the whole grubby business.

"We operate within the law but also within what we regard as reasonable and responsible", insisted Julia King, GlaxoSmithKline's head of corporate responsibility.

This will be news to the US internal revenue service which in January served Glaxo with a $5bn tax bill for manipulating the prices it charges between subsidiary companies in various countries including Singapore, where it manufactures many of its major drugs because of the extremely low tax rate.

The episode repeated a similar run-in with the UK's Inland Revenue nearly 10 years ago, when the company also had to cough up hundreds of millions for fixing its "transfer prices" with Singapore. Perhaps such behaviour among the big drugs companies is regarded as entirely "reasonable and responsible".

In the City

REVENUE recognition – when to take sales and hopefully profits into account – is one of the major battlegrounds among bean-counters when it comes to deciding that the "true and fair view" standard has been met for company accounts.

Many of the excesses of the dot-com and telecom bubble stocks were due to recognising revenues too soon or that they were anything but real revenues. As a result there has been some considerable tightening in the rules. But there are still some suspicions in the City that what you see with some companies may not be what shareholders end up getting.

Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, companies can be a little sensitive when it is suggested, however unjustified, that they might be flattering their results by a too generous interpretation of the revenue recognition rules and counting sales before they are made or not allowing for cancellations or problems.

Certainly iSOFT, the healthcare software group which is a major supplier to the NHS, has seemed remarkably sensitive on the matter of its accounting policies ever since Labour MP Paul Farrelly and the *Guardian* started raising questions last July.

iSOFT is a major player in the £6bn IT programme to electronically link all NHS sites. The company has several contracts with local service providers for electronic care records technology.

Farrelly has been told that the department of health has no concerns about iSOFT's financial viability, while the *Guardian* is being pursued in court for breach of confidence over information from company documents which it may or may not have. A response some might see as a little OTT which itself arouses suspicions where no doubt there should be none.

Meanwhile the iSOFT share price has been in decline, helped downwards by directors selling shares worth £44m and the still unexplained suspension of business development director Mark Woodbridge. The shares hit 446p in June on better than expected results but have since been as low as 320p. They are now around 370p.

Part of the stock market concern relates to the supposed contents of a due diligence report produced by accountant Deloitte & Touche for rival Torex ahead of its agreed £700m merger with iSOFT last year. iSOFT has declined to discuss the report publicly.

According to informed City sources, Deloittes suggested that certain of the company's policies for revenue recognition were "aggressive". This followed a study of just three NHS contracts which were said to show that the company took credit for 100 percent of its licence fees up front and 70 percent of its income for maintenance, hardware and installation.

If true, while this was not improper and was accepted by auditors RSM Robson Rhodes, it seems Deloittes had some concerns about the policy and its impact on profits. These concerns no doubt would have been satisfied if they had been able to examine more than just three contracts.

And it is important to recognise that despite these Deloitte doubts, the Torex board, which included as finance director the now suspended Woodbridge, went ahead with the deal.

However, some analysts wonder about the effect its revenue recognition policies may be having on iSOFT's results when it comes to the all-important NHS contracts. It has won three contracts which could be worth £500m in revenues. Is there a possibility that revenue is being recognised too soon, taking too little or no account for future problems which so often beset ambitious IT projects in Britain?

That concern has been increased by suggestions that in the current year iSOFT might recognise at least £30m of £120m in licence revenue coming from the NHS contracts. For 2004 turnover of the merged group was £149m. If so, this has undoubtedly been accepted as perfectly proper by Robson Rhodes.

Supporters of iSOFT point to the notes to the accounts which spell out in some detail the policies for defining turnover and recognising profits. Turnover for software sales is recognised at the time the licence is granted "in accordance with agreed contractual triggers, typically the supply of the software product to the customer". Revenues from installation, maintenance and support services are "recognised proportionally over the period the services are provided with due regard for future anticipated costs".

Another smaller issue that has been raised relates to a little noticed acquisition in the Philippines which seems to have gone badly wrong. The Gleneagles company was acquired in October 2002 just before the half-year point of the interim results for just over £2m but had to be written off a year later. iSOFT has now begun legal action to recover the purchase price.

No announcement has been made about either the acquisition or the reversal of the deal and resulting legal action. Perhaps because it was not considered material. This has raised questions about whether any contribution from Gleneagles was taken into the 2003 results. It is believed that the cost of reversing the deal has been provided for in the 2004 accounts.

The company has been at pains to confirm that there are "no issues with iSOFT's accounting policies". It also stated that the Deloitte report had been "taken out of context". Revenue recognition can be a vexed though important issue. One accountant's "aggressive" can be another's "acceptable". Perhaps it would better for reasons of transparency if iSOFT, even though it undoubtedly has nothing to hide, made clearer exactly what its revenue recognition policies were over licence fees and other income so ensuring that the City can be as satisfied as the directors – CBI director-general Digby Jones is a non-exec – and the auditors.

ONCE again it seems a deal is about to be reached on compensation for the split capital trusts scandal between the financial services authority (FSA) and the 22 City firms responsible for the £620m lost by some 50,000 investors.

Talks on compensation have been ongoing for months. But as feared, the FSA, which has refused to learn from the approach of New York State attorney-general Eliot Spitzer to Wall Street – sue first then settle – has continued to use softly, softly tactics.

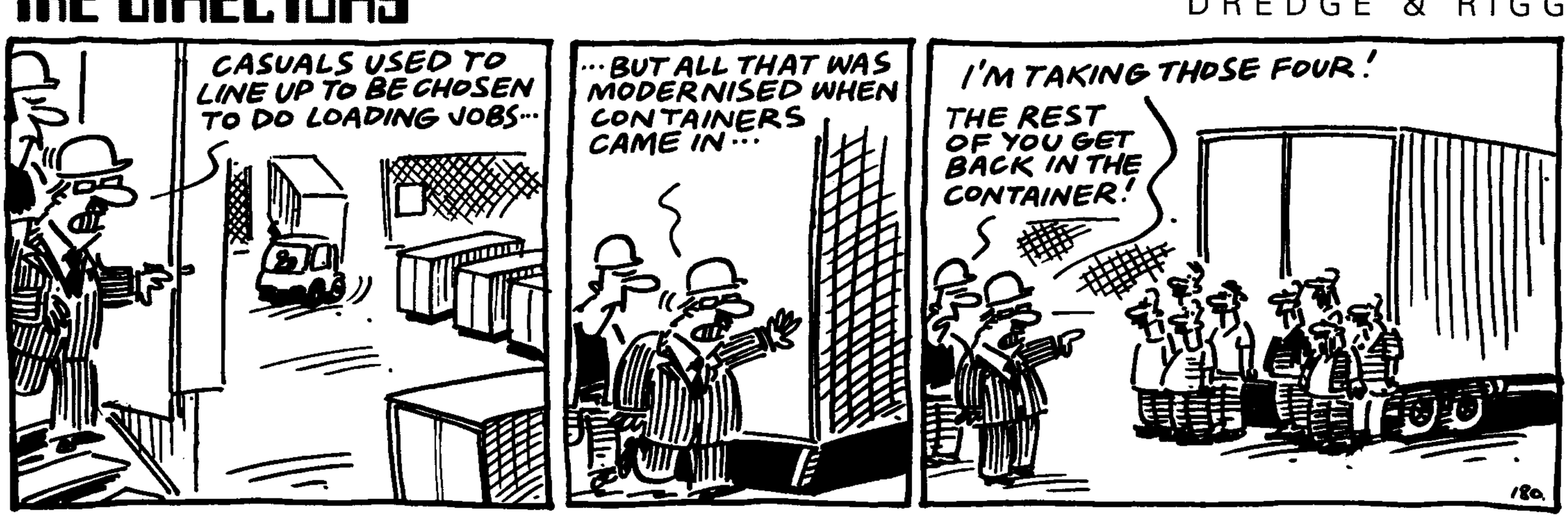
The predictable result is that the latest prediction is that the guilty fund managers, sponsoring brokers and banks plus their insurers will maybe offer to pay £200m to £235m in full and final settlement. A few individuals will be sacrificed. But there will be no admissions that can be used to sue by still unhappy victims – probably most of the 50,000.

That compares with the FSA's original demand in May for £350m and the previous suggested deal figure of £275m. To put that in context. The Association of Investment Trust Companies estimated that the losses on the supposed least risky zero-dividend preference shares sold to private investors who unlike institutions will be eligible for compensation was alone £310m.

The guilty companies – who made tens of millions in fees from the sale of up to £12bn worth of "splits" – started by offering £120m which the FSA rejected as "far short of what is necessary". If the deal is struck at £200m or thereabouts, it will be a definite result for those among the guilty City suits who have insisted on playing hardball with the FSA. Already it seems that investors expectations are being managed downwards. Hopefully for a surprise bigger figure and resulting talk of an FSA triumph. More likely seems the City equivalent of peace in our time!

But why should we be surprised at the inability of FSA chief executive John Tiner to walk the walk. It is rumoured that when John Duffield of New Star Asset Management threatened to sue the FSA over allegations by an official that investors in "splits" had been "ripped off", Tiner went scuttling to Duffield's office to resolve the matter rather than requiring that Mohamed come to the regulatory mountain.

The sorry history of the handling of the "splits" scandal by the FSA with its ever-changing deadlines and reducing demands hardly indicates


CASUALS USED TO LINE UP TO BE CHOSEN TO DO LOADING JOBS...
...BUT ALL THAT WAS MODERNISED WHEN CONTAINERS CAME IN...
I'M TAKING THOSE FOUR!
THE REST OF YOU GET BACK IN THE CONTAINER!
180.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Not exactly sparkling

An investment one year ago in...

that it is the tough regulator the City needs.

WESTERN investors and politicians are up in arms over plans by the Russian authorities to auction Yukos' main subsidiary for a minimum $8.6bn compared with the lowest fair value of $15.7bn placed on Yuganskneftegaz's oil assets by the government's own valuer.

Yukos shareholders, lead from jail by former chief executive Mikhail Khodorkovsky, and its executives in exile talk of legal action. The Russians claim they are doing this to recoup supposed Yukos tax debts of up to $25bn. Few believe that and consider the Putin plan is to neutralise Khodorkovsky as a political rival (job done) and ensure the safe transfer of control of Yukos assets to friendly Russian hands, such as the state-owned Gazprom. The auction is due later this month.

Meanwhile those in the West fuming with outrage should consider the following facts which explain why most Russians have a different view. Khodorkovsky and his friends manipulated the theft of Yukos from the Russian taxpayer for just $300m in the mid-90s under the Yeltsin-approved loans-for-shares scam. Within a few years Yukos, almost half-owned by Khodorkovsky and friends, was worth $30bn. Today it is still valued at $2bn.

Khodorkovsky stole Yukos from the state, now the state is stealing it back. It may not be capitalism – but for Russians it might just be justice.

'Slicker'

BEAN-COUNTING NEWS

WHO is Graham Ward, the leading accountant who has been appointed president of the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC)?

Ancient readers may recall how Britain's big accountancy firms, largely through the efforts of Price Waterhouse and Ernst & Young, went through the motions of trying to persuade the Jersey parliament to introduce "limited liability partnerships" (LLPs) under which partners in the big firms wouldn't face the loss of personal assets if they were sued.

The accountants never wanted to move to Jersey but threatened the British government they would do so to persuade the department of trade to allow British LLPs. This shameless tactic, which paid off in 2001, was exposed at a Commons trade committee back in 1999 when Labour MP Martin O'Neill confronted the then vice-president of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, Mr Graham Ward, with the accusation that the accountants were holding a gun to the government's head.

"There were some individual firms who certainly did [make] representations to the legislature in Jersey… to that extent then yes, that is right," Ward admitted before claiming that "certainly our institute did not apply any such pressure".

What he didn't say was that the firm that not only made representations but paid for the drafting of the Jersey law was Price Waterhouse where he was then a senior partner.

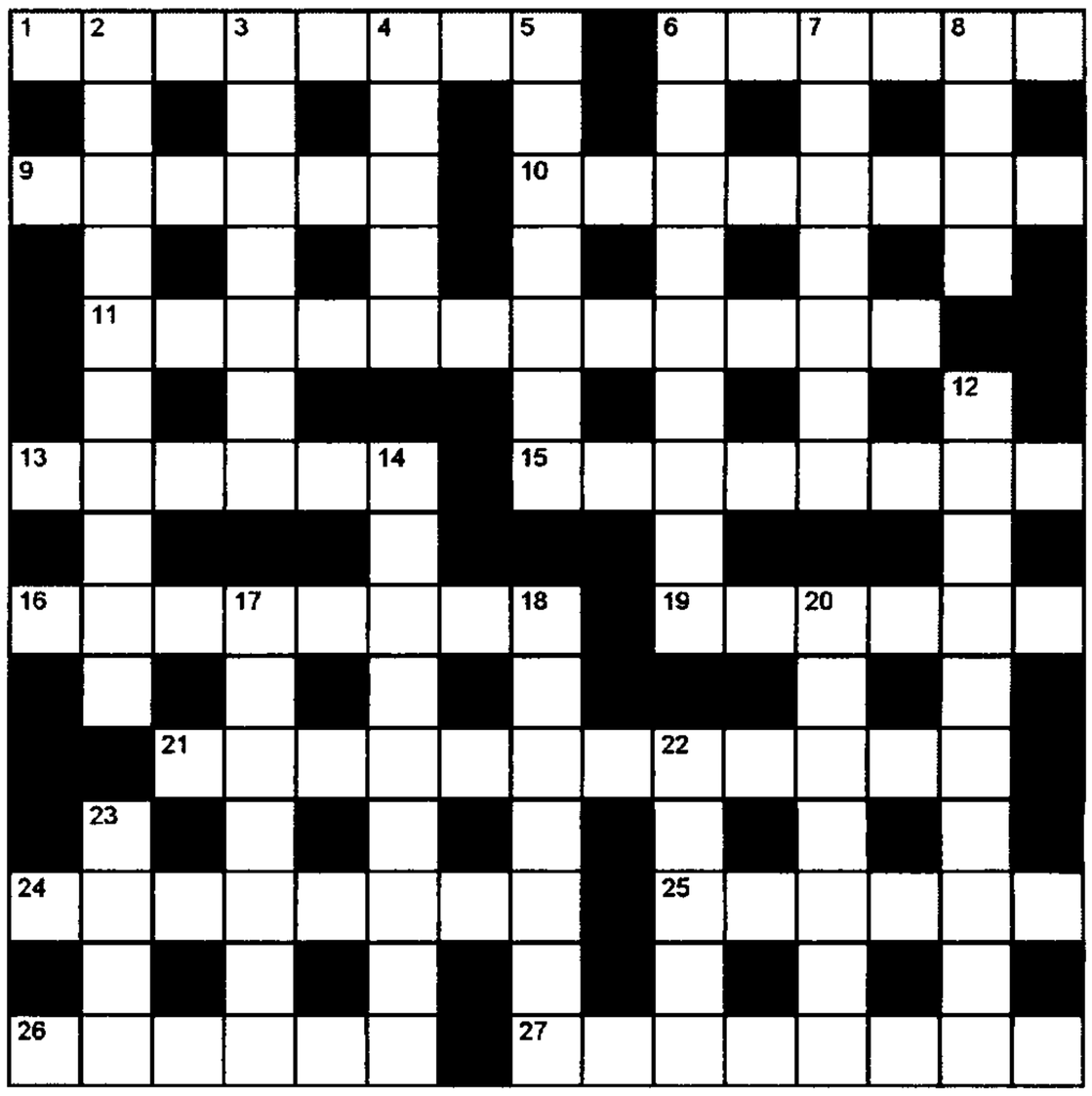
At IFAC Ward pledges to help developing nations "build an accountancy profession characterised by adherence to high standards and IFAC's core values of integrity, transparency and expertise". Who can doubt it!

EYE CROSSWORD 276

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 15 December 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



Next issue – £500 Super Crossword

ACROSS

1 "Unemployed come clean" rumour (4,4)
6 Preserve spunk (6)
9 A position for "Mile High" shaggers possibly revealed in terribly dim broadcast (6)
10 Punched out crap editor round Cross holiday island (8)
11 Proposed legislation to protect our betters, supposedly (8,4)
13 Put down, like, during a shag (6)
15 Old Greek historian: "Sex devotee Clinton, too, finishes on the 'blower', getting end away" (8)
16/24 Fanny in danger of being tourniqueted, because possessor thereof failed to stay calm? (8,2,1,5)
19 The ultimate in corporate transport? (6)
21 Shop a licensee suffering with DTs (12)
24 See 16
25 Blair's lost direction, flipping lout – his partner's much more mature (6)
26 Singer Charlotte (not Church) accepted as a little horror (6)
27 A fall from the top: prince drops two points – useless going round (8)

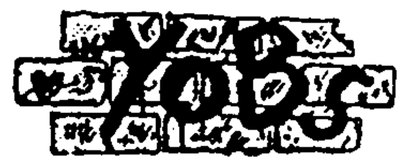
DOWN

2 Crooked banking duo emulating Lord Lucan (5,1,4)
3 Scholar, total stuck up arse pissed at the front (7)
4 Pertaining to an organ in one Gents (not fashionable) (5)
5 Eager to devour Lewinksy's top once, Clinton regrets this wasn't rubbed thoroughly on her dress? (7)
6 No support for ministerial arses? (4,5)
7 Knock around, lech casually and this could result (3,4)
8 Is in a situation such as Jeffrey Archer is familiar with? (4)
12 Casually producing a book, maybe, *The Wanker's Art* (7,3)
14 One who'll recommend regime change in India, etc. with Cyclops at the centre (9)
17 Fast mover, not the sort to remain faithful to an audience (7)
18 Screwed Ray, the journalist (7)
20 One who proves gold comes out of arse, say? (7)
22 Feel Tony is ditching rather mad Ben (5)
23 Headless stiff's pound note (4)

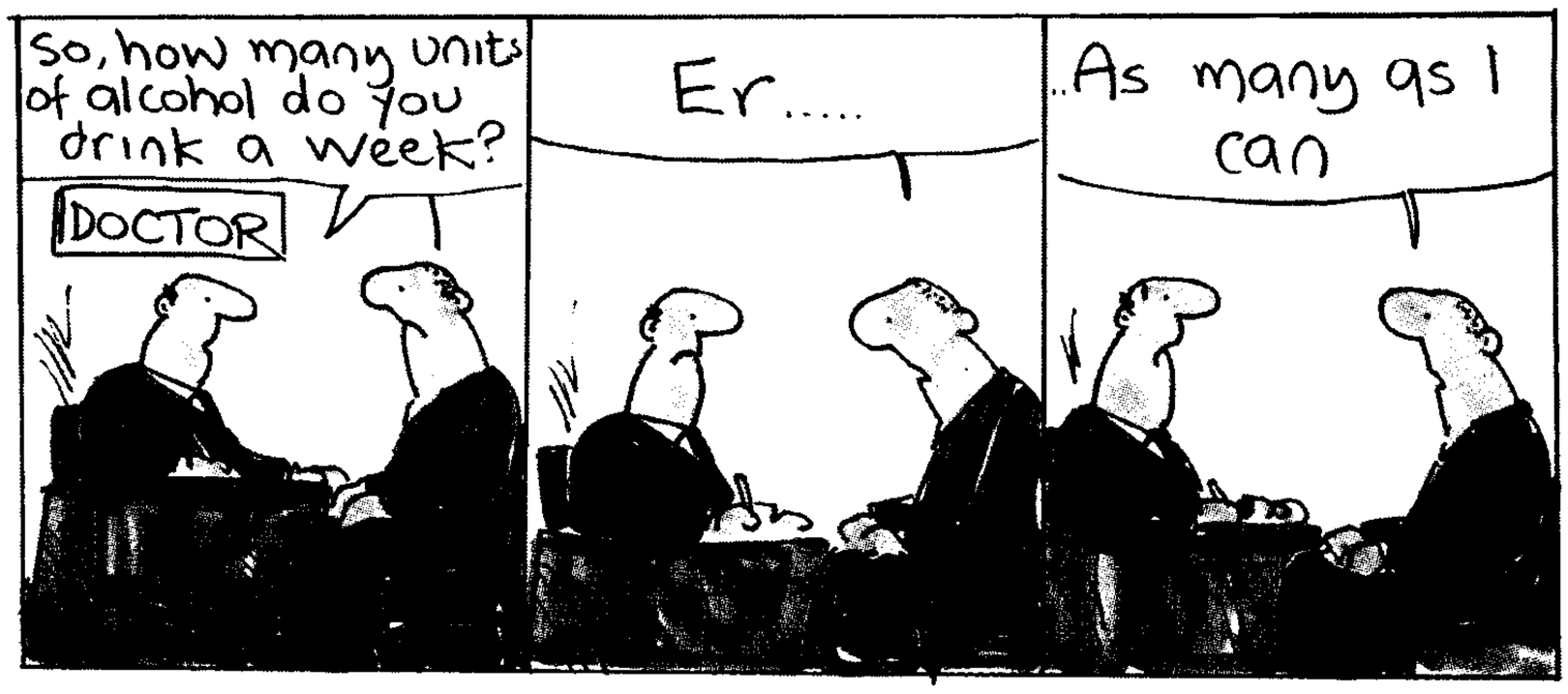
Crossword 275 winner: MARK PREECE

ACROSS: 1/6 Spanking new 10 Prescott 11 Cock a snook 12 Bust 13 Big guns 15 Entombs 17 Hang-ups 19 Asinine 22/8 Oval Office 24 Ungrounded 26 Cobblers 27 Orgasm 28/29 Max Clifford.

DOWN: 2 Prick 3 Nielsen 4 Improv 5 Gherkin 6 Nick Brown 7 Watts 9 Florida 14 Gogglebox 16 Bonkers 18 Poulenc 20 Show-off 21 Agassi 23 Vroom 25 Niger.



HUSBAND



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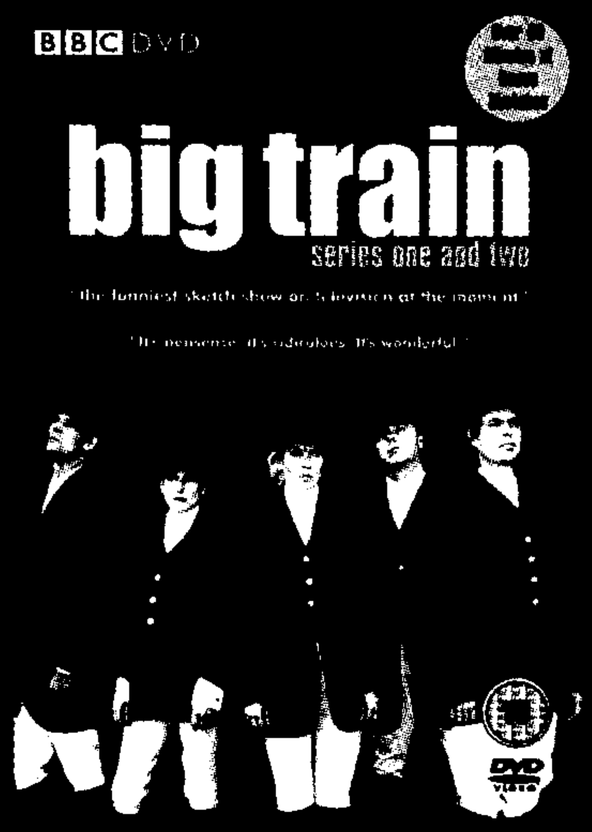
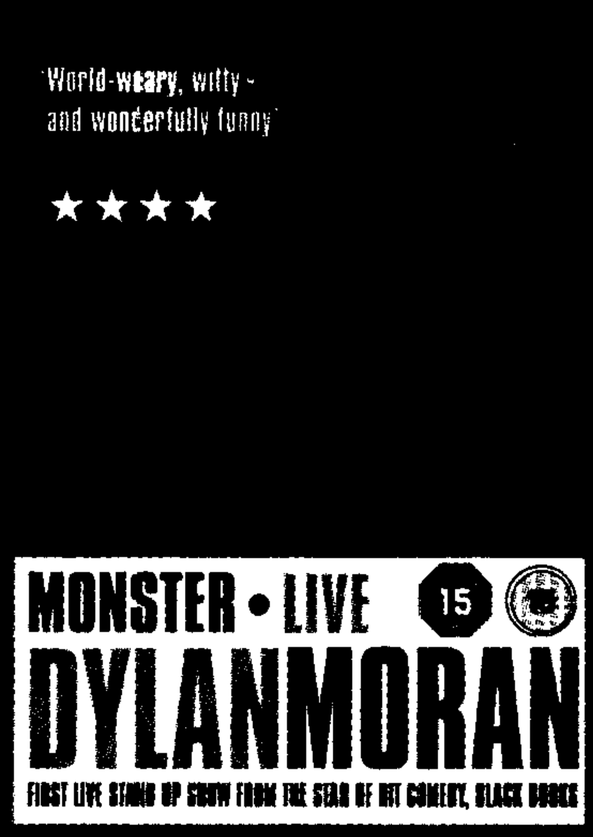
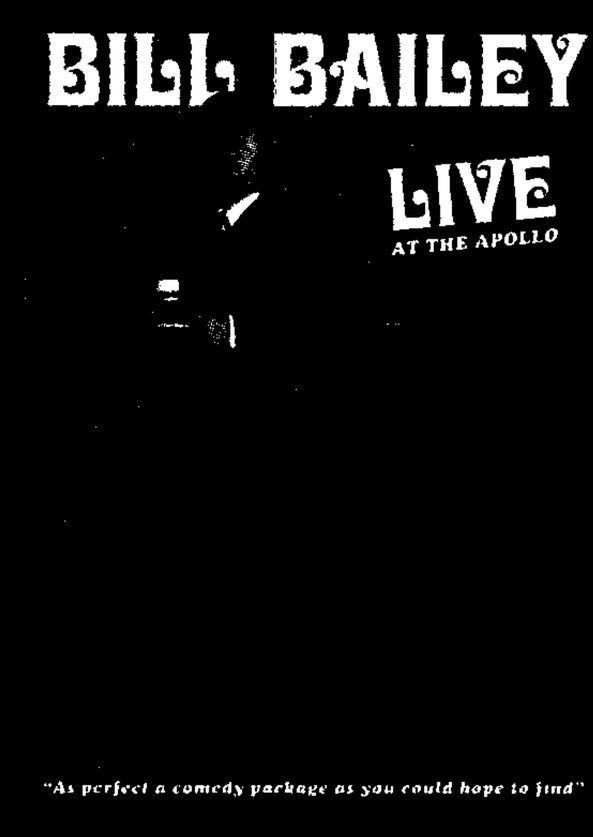


Big Train
Series One And Two
2DVD

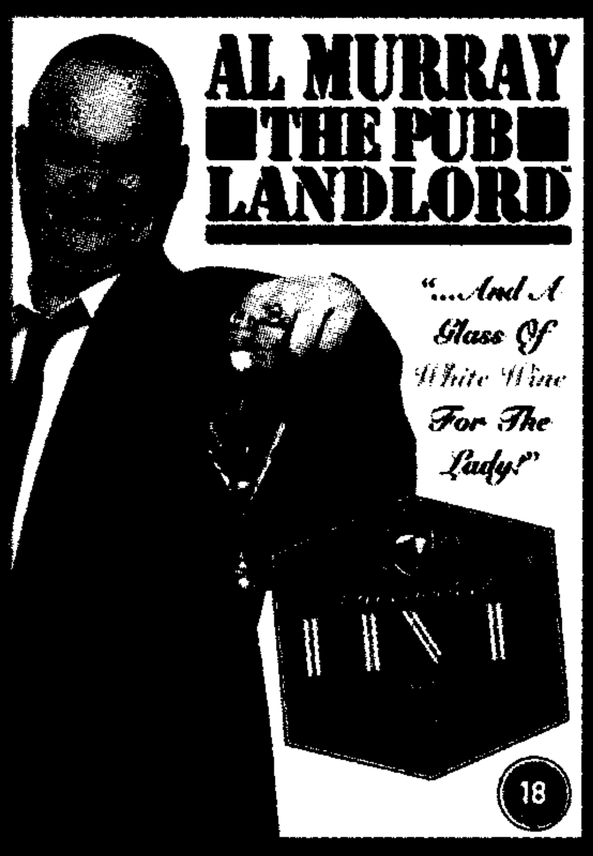


Dylan Moran Live
Monster
DVD

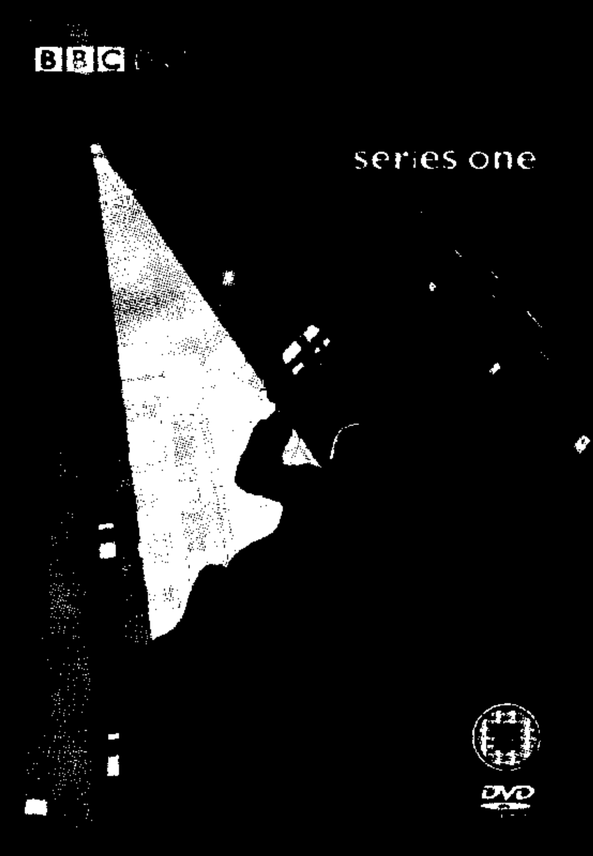


Bill Bailey Live
Part Troll
DVD

3 Non Blondes
The Complete Series Collection
3DVD



Al Murray The Pub Landlord
...And A Glass Of White Wine
For The Lady!
DVD



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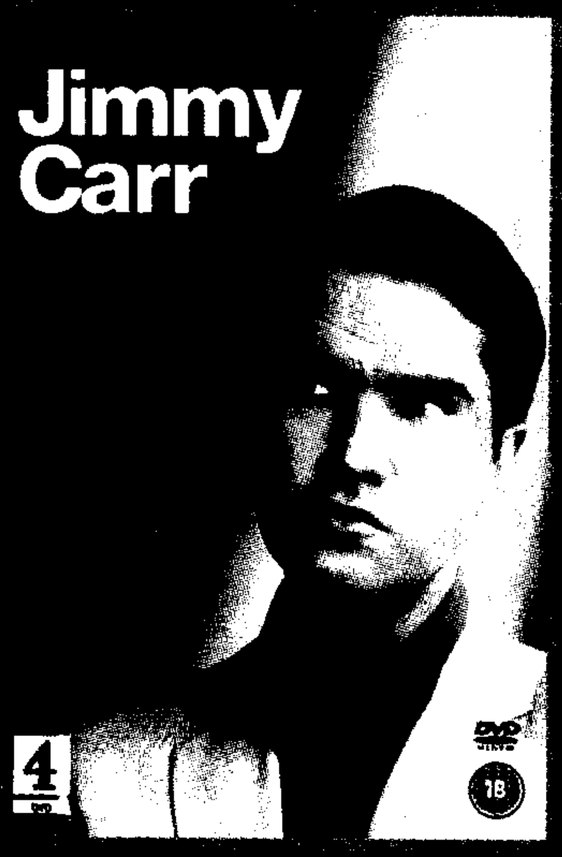

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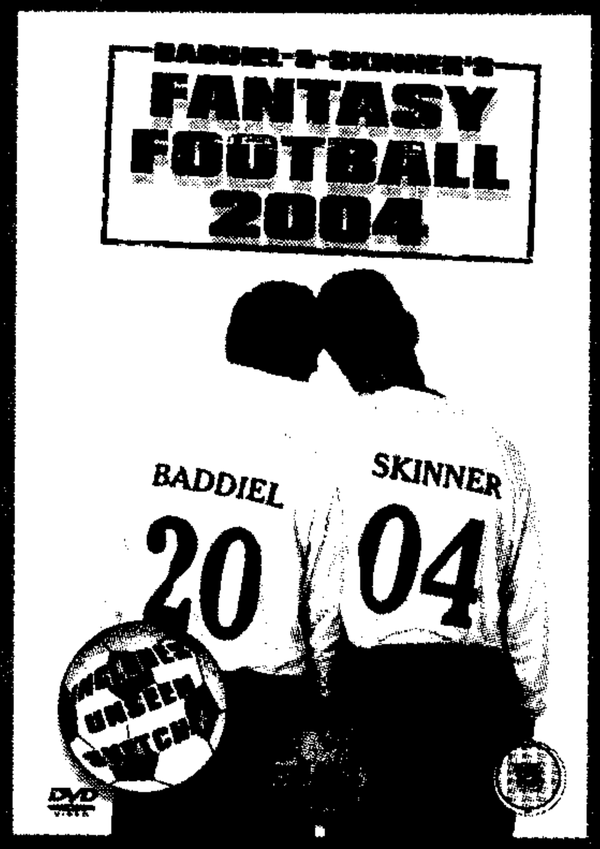

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DVD

The Simpsons Christmas 2
DVD

Seinfeld Seasons 1-3
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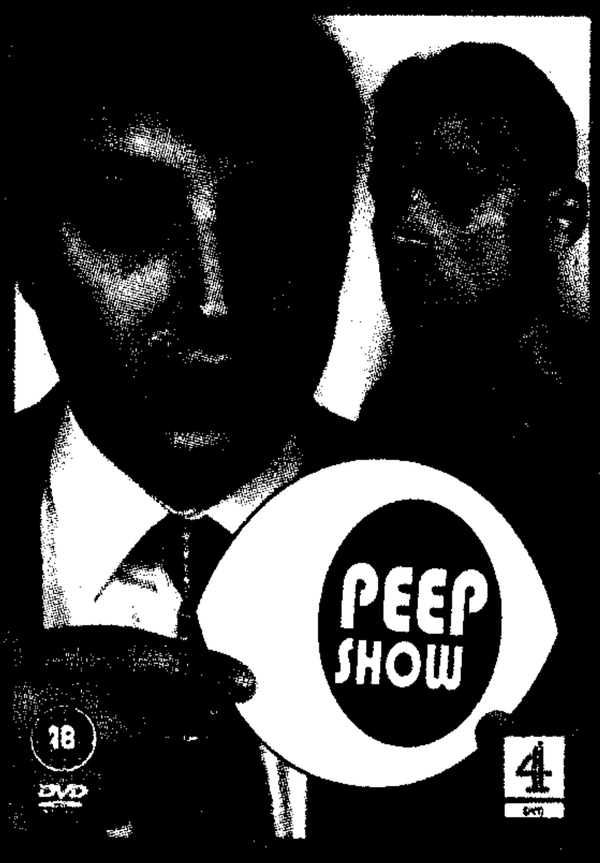

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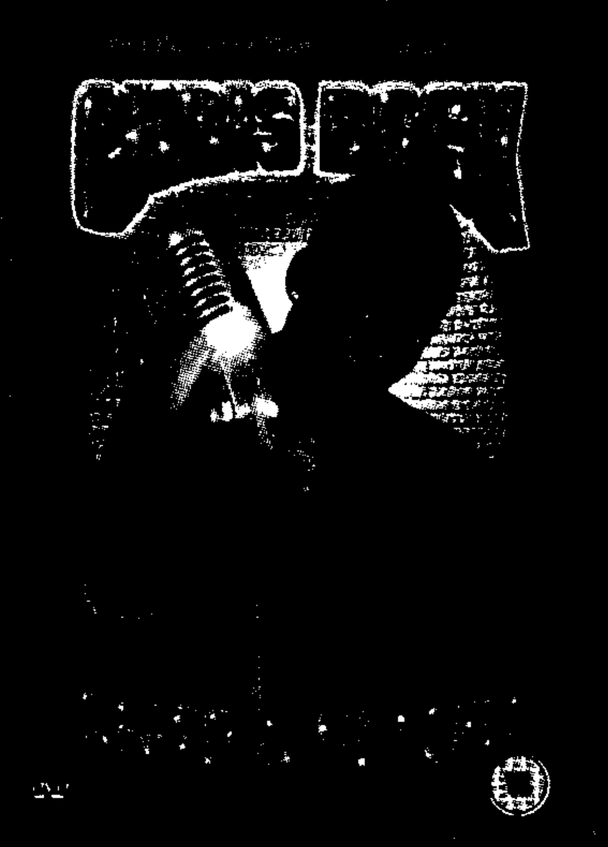

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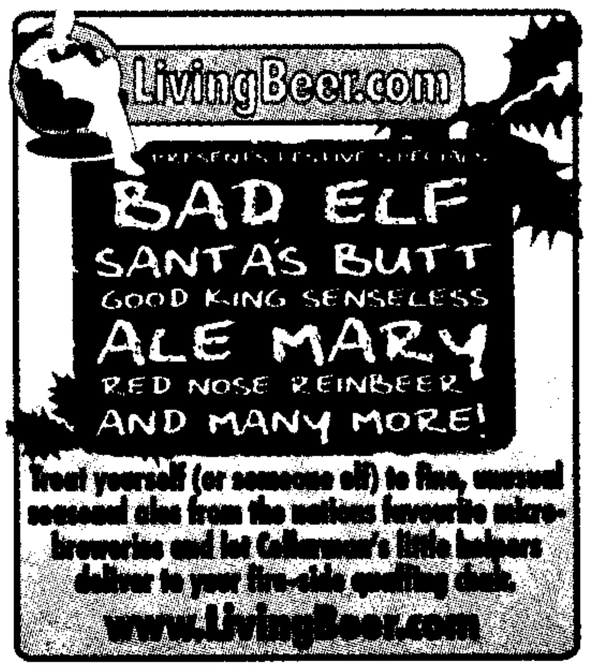

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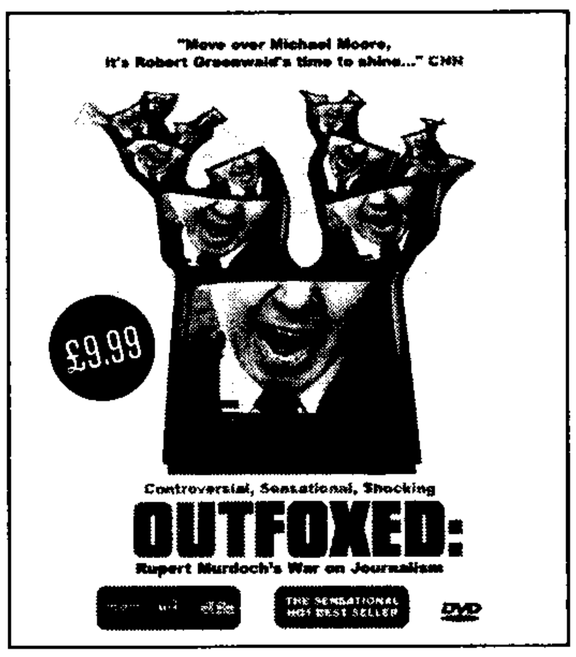

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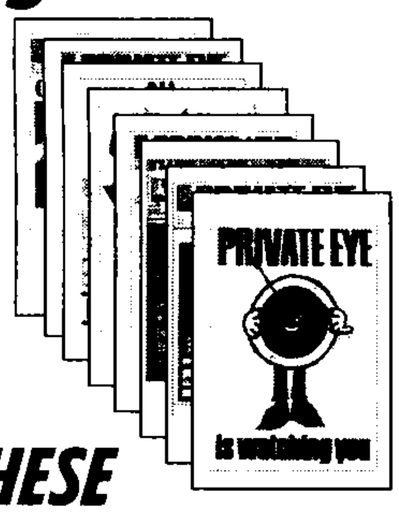

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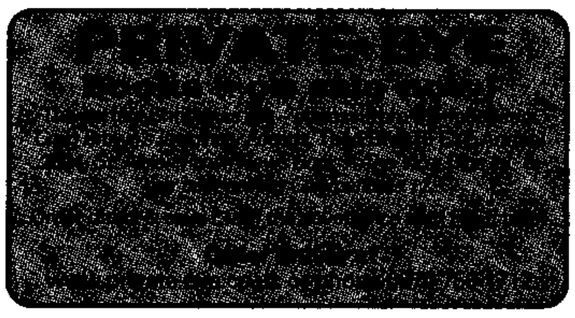

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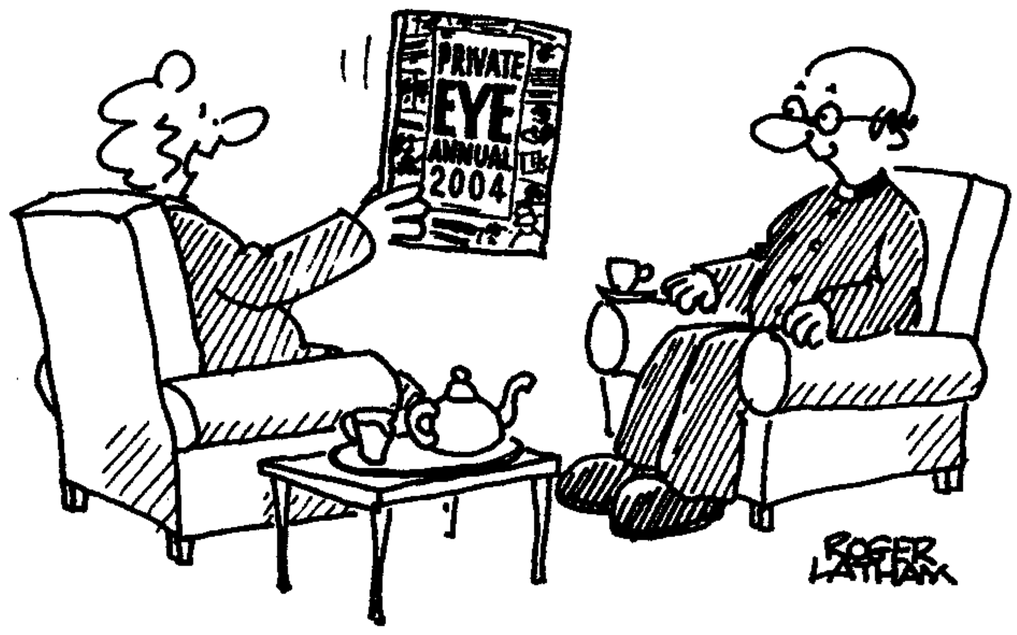

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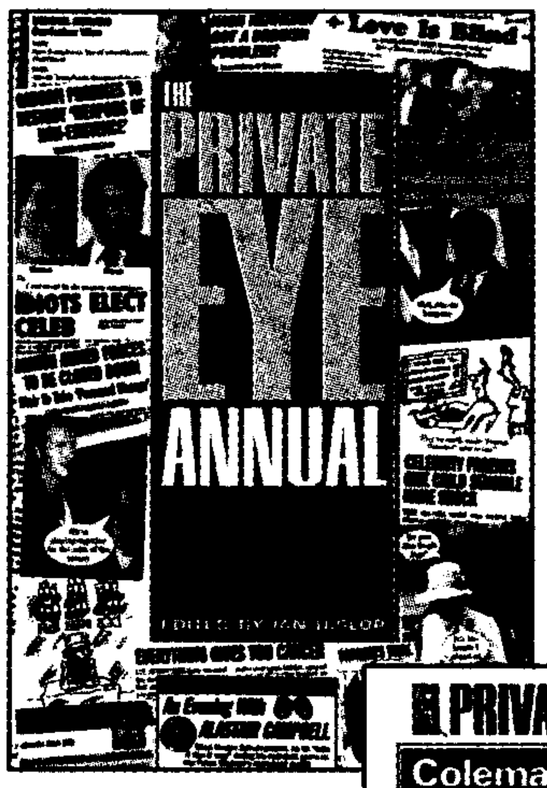

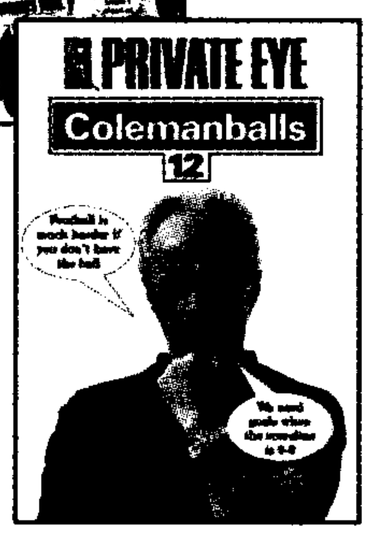

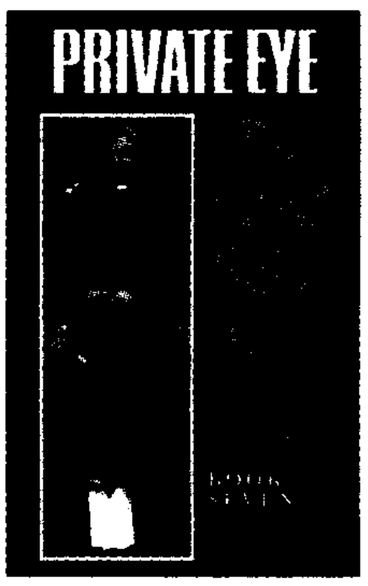

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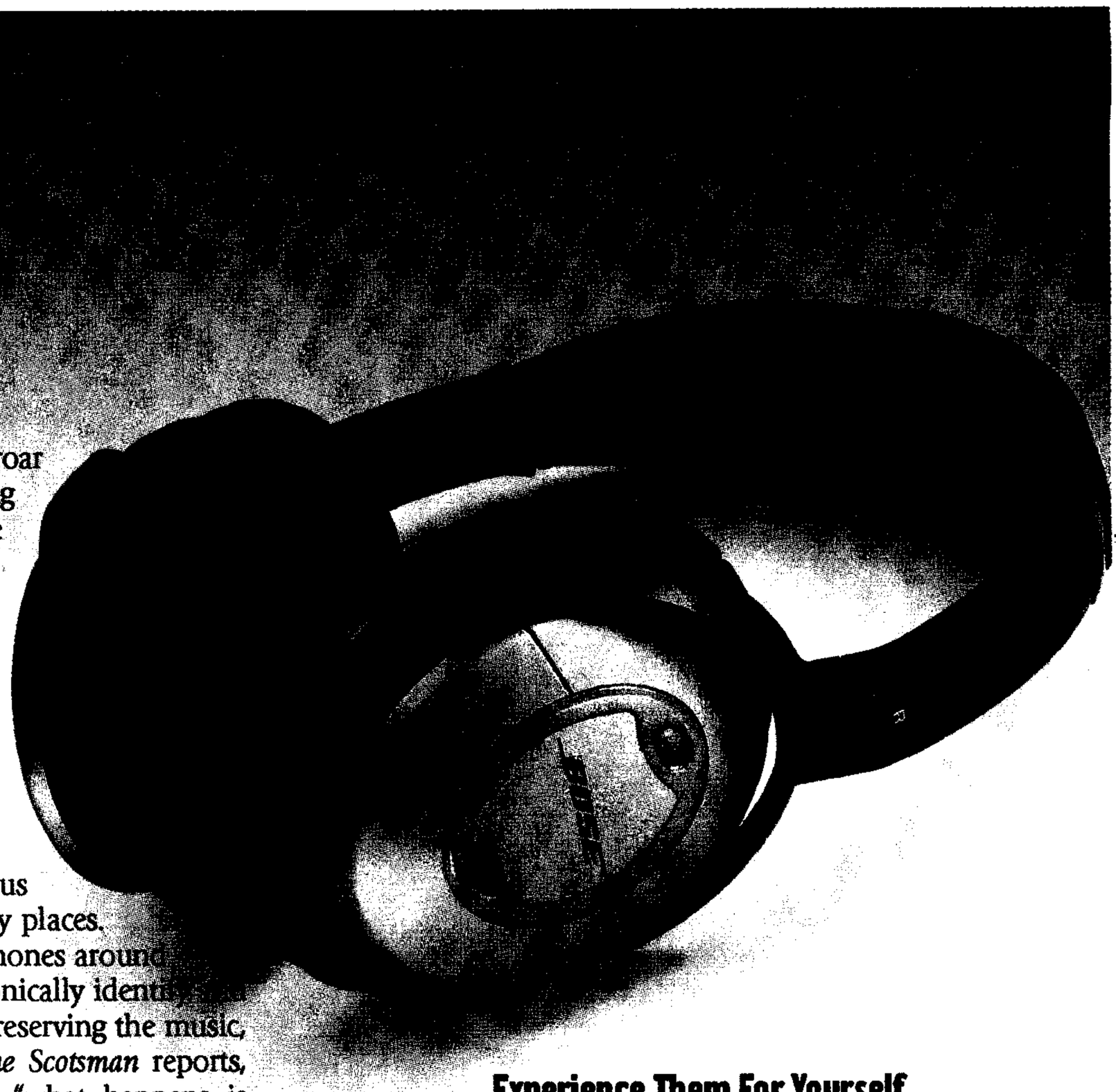

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Our original noise-reducing headphones were designed primarily for aeroplane travellers. But owners soon started telling us how much they enjoyed them in other noisy places. So we designed our QuietComfort® 2 headphones around the same U.S. patented technology to electronically identify and dramatically reduce noise, while faithfully preserving the music, movie dialogue or silence you want. As *The Scotsman* reports, when you switch on the noise reduction "what happens is remarkable... your world becomes a quieter, more lovely place."

Our Best Sound Ever.

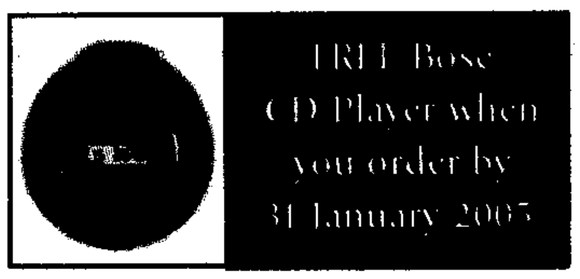
QuietComfort®2 headphones deliver the best audio performance we have ever developed for headphones. Highs are impressively crisp and clean. Lows are deep and enveloping. Vocals are reproduced with lifelike authenticity. *Exclusive Homes* says that the "Audio quality is superb. As virtually all exterior noise is reduced, clarity of the music or speech you are listening to is massively enhanced." Whether you are looking for noise reduction or high-performance headphones for music, we think you'll agree – QuietComfort® 2 headphones simply make your music sound better.

Enhanced Comfort And Portability.

Stuff magazine gives these headphones five stars and calls them "the kings of silence." *TravelPlus* says they're "incredibly comfortable, too, creating a sense of personal space." To enjoy peace and quiet, simply turn them on. To add Bose-quality sound, attach the audio cable and connect them to a home stereo, laptop computer, portable CD/MP3 player or in-flight audio system. When you are done, our new fold-flat design allows you to quickly tuck your headphones away in a bag or briefcase, so you can take them almost anywhere.

Experience Them For Yourself.

We don't expect you to take our word for how dramatically our new headphones reduce noise, how clean and full they sound or how comfortably they fit. So we invite you to try them risk-free for 30 days, satisfaction guaranteed. If you can live without them, return them for a full refund. It's that simple. Call now and ask about **free delivery**[1] and our convenient instalment plan which lets you make **4 equal payments over a period of up to 10 months with no interest charges from Bose.*** Pay either monthly or quarterly; the choice is yours. Learn more about our **FREE portable Bose CD Player** offer – worth £40. QuietComfort® 2 headphones – the new standard from Bose, one of the most respected names in sound.



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For information on all our products: www.bose.co.uk/3512

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[1]UK deliveries only. *Instalment payment plan is available on credit/debit cards only and subject to status. Initial payment for either the monthly or quarterly plan is due at time of order and all payments will be charged to your credit/debit card on the date the instalment is due. Monthly payments will be charged each month over a 4-month period. Quarterly payments must be completed within 10 months and after your initial payment, your credit/debit card will be charged every 3 months. There will be no interest charges from Bose. In the event of late payment, credit/debit card company interest charges may apply. Payment plan, free delivery and free CD Player offers not to be combined with any other offer or applied to previous purchases. Stocks limited. Offer available while stocks last. Price and/or payment plan subject to change without notice. Delivery subject to product availability. If product is returned, portable CD Player must be returned for a full refund. ©2004 Bose Corporation. All rights reserved. Quotes reprinted with permission from: Nick Brandon, *The Scotsman*, 6/9/03; *Exclusive Homes*, 10/03; *Stuff*, 1/04; *TravelPlus*, 11/03.

Bose has been voted Cool BrandLeaders 2004 and No. 1 cool technology brand.

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